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Lesbian Gender Identities: An Expansion of Bern's Sex-Role Inventory

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Sheilagh Van Belthowing for the Master of Science in Sociology presented September 5, 2000.

Title: Lesbian Gender Identities: An Expansion of Bem's Sex-Role Inventory

The central research question of the current study had to do with self- an stereotypically- gendered identities of lesbians. The purpose was to determine the nature and form of gender identity and gender stereotypes among women who self-identify as lesbians, and more specifically, to determine whether or not "gender" means the same to lesbians as it does to heterosexual women. Identity measures were Bem's (1974) Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) and a butch-femme rating scale. The sample consisted of 65 women who self-identified as lesbian. The lesbians in the current sample did identify more strongly with masculine attributes (Masculinity scale mean = 5.27) than with feminine attributes (Femininity scale means = 5.07). Interestingly, the current sample's mean Masculinity scores were higher than those of women (heterosexual, sexual orientation unknown, and lesbians) in prior research. The majority of butches and femmes identified as masculine and feminine, respectively.

As indicated from prior research subjects, and even more strongly among the lesbians in this study, traits such as "cheerful," "shy," "flatterable," "childlike," "does not use harsh language," and "lives children" may no longer be self-descriptions of lesbians or heterosexual women. The lesbians in this study described themselves as assertive and independent and also as nurturant and sensitive. It may be that the terms

like "agency" and "emphatic" will in the future be more useful than the dichotomized masculine and feminine labels.

LESBIAN GENDER IDENTITIES:

AN EXPANSION OF BEM'S SEX-ROLE INVENTORY

by

SHEILAGH VAN BELTHOWING

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Dedication

There was one woman who has been the most important and influential to me in my life and that was my grandmother, Eva A. Light. I am only sorry that she is not here in the physical sense to see this piece of work. All my life my grandmother has never questioned anything I wanted to do. She always knew that it was my choice and that I would eventually share it with her. I wish that I could have had a little more time with her before she died, I didn't even get to say goodbye, as she left as soon as my plane landed in the airport.

So here is what I would say to her if I were given just a few more minutes:

> I am very happy in Oregon, my daughter is doing very well -- a career girl at 20 -- and I have a few things I want to tell you. I am in love with a beautiful woman and we have been together for over six years now. You would love her, she has all of your bad habits, including leaving the cupboard doors open. But she also has all your good habits, like always asking me if I washed my hands after I go to the bathroom.
>
> I have worked hard to get myself through school and I have three degrees now. Remember every time I sneezed -- it consisted of a session of three sneezes -- and Grandpa always said that I was going to be a teacher? I never really knew what he meant but it is true - I am a teacher now and I really enjoy it. The students are always very sweet and are eager to learn. So if you are with grandpa please tell him what I said.
>
> Anyway, I must go now, I know you have things to do. Oh by the way I saw you at your funeral and you looked beautiful -- still not wanting to wear shoes though --
>
> Sheilagh

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wife L. She is the one who made my completion of this the most important. We have been together since the first day I started Portland State University. And she has been the one who has had to wait the longest for me to be done. L has read and re-read this thesis as many times as my committee chair and has never complained, but only had constructive feedback for improvements.

I would also like to thank my daughter Dawn A. Renee'. I feel that most of my time has been spent away from her, and that if I could give her one thing it would be more time together. Maybe with this finally done, I can see her more often and do things together.

I want to give a special thank you to my thesis chair Dr. Kathryn Farr. She has endured many re-writes, as well as helped me to better understand the English language (grammar). I can see sometimes the errors I am making before I let the ink leave the paper. Dr. Farr you have been an angel, and I thank you with all my heart.

I would like to thank Dr. Peter Collier. I must have put him through hell trying to get the concept of the Differentiated Model. I hope I have done you and it justice.

I would also like to thank Miss. Maibel for use of her name. I know she is only 8 months old as of this writing, but she has given me many hours of fun and enjoyment. I am sure that she does not mind my using her name for our lady of coming out, but anyway I asked her mother L. if it was okay.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The gendered development of identities and roles begins at birth and arguably involves one of the most important socialization messages that families and the culture at large communicate to children. Socialization is the process by which a society's values and norms, including those pertaining to gender, are taught and learned. Societal expectations are that girls will conform to norms of femininity, and conversely that norms of masculinity will become internalized by boys. Boys in particular receive explicit negative sanctions for engaging in what is sometimes considered gender-inappropriate behavior (Renzetti & Curran 1999). A person's gender identity is their understanding and self-application of the cultural gender expectations associated with being masculine or feminine. Sandra Bem describes the attributes most recognized for men as masculinity with an instrumental orientation, in other words, a "cognitive focus on getting the job done" (Bem 1974:156). Attributes most accredited to women, according to Bem, are associated with an expressive orientation, or an "affective concern for the welfare of others" (156).

For the last few decades, researchers have inquired into the stereotypes that people have of men and women. Both men and women tend to agree on the attributes that they believe are typical of each sex. In essence, men are generally held to be strong, independent, successful, courageous, aggressive, and logical (Renzetti & Curran 1999). Women are viewed as more gentle, dependent on men for support and protection, nurturing, emotional, and submissive (Renzetti & Curran 1999).

Gender attributes were studied in great detail during the 1970s and 1980s by researchers who used a variety of research procedures (Bergen & Williams 1991). Studies done on gender roles used subjects who were typically presumed to be heterosexual. Institutionalized heterosexism leaves out many marginalized groups, most notably sexual minorities, who often do not fit traditional society's ideals. Mainstream audiences rarely hear the views of sexual minorities because they are hardly ever published or communicated by the media. In fact, their lives are often misrepresented -- if they are represented at all. The purpose of the present research is to explore meanings of gender among women who self-identify as lesbian.

The term gender is problematic itself. For the purposes of this research, gender is defined as attributes and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity -- regardless of one's biological sex (e.g., some women may be perceived as "masculine"). Gender identity, then is the extent to which individuals self-identify as feminine or masculine, as well as with traits that are descriptive of each. The problem is that the terms "gender" and "sex" are sometimes used interchangeably -- as in gender-typing/sex-typing, gender roles/sex roles. Indeed, the researcher whose work has informed the present study uses the term sex -- sex-typing and cross-sex-typing, for example -- as interchangeable with my definition of gender.

Further confusion may revolve around the term "sexual orientation." Basically sexual orientation refers to a person's preference for the same or opposite sex partners (e.g., homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual). If, for example, women are expected to be feminine, and lesbianism is associated stereotypically with non-

femininity, or with masculinity, then gender identities of lesbians are clearly problematized. The central research question here has to do with self- and stereotypically- gendered identities of lesbians. The purpose is to determine the nature and form of gender identity and gender stereotypes among women who self-identify as lesbians, and more specifically to determine whether or not "gender" means the same thing to lesbians as it does to heterosexual women. Stereotypical heterosexual gender traits are known well in Western culture; for example, if asked whether the adjective "fearful" describes the "feminine" or the "masculine," most people would have little trouble in answering. As described above, on the other hand, lesbian gender is problematized, confounded by heterosexist assumptions about homosexuality and by the experiences of lesbians themselves. Studies comparing gender identity of lesbians with heterosexual women find there is inconsistency in femininity measures (Finlay & Scheltema 1991), but more consistent findings of higher masculinity scores among lesbians than heterosexual women. For instance, Oberstone and Sukonek (1976) found that lesbians had higher masculinity scores than heterosexual women, but the two groups had similar femininity scores. Other studies have reported no differences for masculinity and femininity scores with women of differing sexual orientations (Jones & DeCecco 1982, storms 1980). Additionally, some research has found lesbians to be more androgynous than heterosexual women (Spence & Helmreich 1978).

One of the best known models from the gender studies of the 1970s and 1980s is the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI). Bem has been researching sex roles

since the early 1970s. At the time she started, it was seen as a questionable topic, but today sex (gender) roles research is taken a lot more seriously. The present study utilizes Bem's Sex-role Inventory as the instrument and model for examining gender among a sample of lesbians.

The BSRI was designed to "assess the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable female and male attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description" (Bem 1979:1048). It is composed of personality characteristics that are seen as both positive in value (for at least one of the sexes) and either masculine or feminine in character. Twenty of the characteristics are stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate, gentle, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others), and twenty are stereotypically masculine (e.g., ambitious, self-reliant, independent, assertive). The BSRI also contains twenty filler items[1] that are completely neutral with respect to gender (e.g., truthful, happy). These twenty, socially desirable characteristics were to provide a neutral context for the masculinity and femininity scales and were developed to insure that the Inventory would not simply tap into the cultural stereotypes. The theory underlying the BSRI is that gender-typed individuals will conform to whatever definitions of femininity and masculinity the culture happens to provide.

Additionally, respondents in this study were asked about "butch" and "femme" roles in lesbian communities. Are butch/femme relationships an imitation of heterosexual relationships? Are they a thing of the past? To what extent do respondents themselves identify with these gendered labels?

The research questions, then, are the following:

1. Is the BSRI a valid measure of femininity and masculinity within a lesbian context?

2. Are masculinity and femininity categories, as framed by Bem, consistent with lesbian identities of butch and femme, respectively?

The dominant (heterosexual) cultural expressions of masculinity and femininity exist in different degrees in men and women. The BSRI assumes that people have adopted these attributes as components of their self-concepts. Deviations from gender-appropriate femininity and masculinity carry potentially stigmatizing consequences.

Lesbian cultural behavior is not based on the hetero-social and sexual models most lesbians grew up with, but rather on "other" types of sexual feelings, and on a learned lesbian-specific cultural behavior. Most writings on lesbian identity conclude that lesbians do not necessarily fit Western cultural norms associated with femininity (Ponse 1980).

Question 2 examines lesbians' identification with traits associated with "butch" and "femme." Popular understandings are that butch and femme is congruent with masculinity and femininity. Lesbian theorist, Gayle Rubin (1992) defines a butch as primarily masculine, a lesbian women who is comfortable with masculine gender codes and styles. Femmes, according to Rubin, are predominantly feminine as defined within the larger, heterosexual culture. In principle, then, lesbians who identify as femme would display the same characteristics as a woman

who is culturally defined as heterosexual. Therefore, this research question called for comparisons between the self-identification rating (butch-femme) and the individuals' masculinity and femininity scores. Within-group comparisons address whether lesbians, who identify as butch or femme, have different masculinity and femininity scores from those who do not identify as either butch or femme?

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PRIOR RESEARCH

Gender, Sexual Orientation and Feminism

Gender attributes were studied in great detail during the 1970's and 1980's by researchers who used a variety of research methods (Bergen & Williams 1991). Like earlier work, these studies typically assumed their subjects were heterosexual in orientation, and findings were seen as generalizable across populations. Terms such as gender, sex and sexuality have often been blurred in the literature and in the public's mind, and thus it seems useful to begin with a discussion of definitional issues, and how terminology has been used in this research.

Gender vs. Sex

Many writers use the term sexual identity when they mean gender identity. Simply put, sex is a person's physiological status as male or female, and gender is a continuous and typically persistent sense of ourselves as male-like or female-like. A person's sexual identity is, then, how they see themselves - either male or female; and their gender identity refers to their understanding of (their) cultural gender roles assigned to that specific sex - either masculine or feminine. However, sexual identity can itself raise questions. Does it mean genetic status as XX or XY, or does it mean the sum of our development up until birth? Or is it simply a social label applied to us by our birth certificates? Does a sexual identity develop self-consciously, through a self-conscious decision within a culture where the concept has relevance? Moreover, how distinct from one another is sexual identity and gender identity? And what traits

are prominent in people's self-attribution regarding gender? Sandra Bem describes masculinity as being associated with an instrumental orientation, a "cognitive focus on getting the job done," and femininity as being associated with an expressive orientation, an "affective concern for the welfare of others" (Ballard & Elton 1992:156). For instance, a physiologically/genetically female's gender roles in Western culture would consist of dependence, sexual receptivity and fragility, motherhood and so forth (Connell 1993). To further complicate matters, a number of scholars have problematized gender, pointing out that there are gender identities other then masculine and feminine, e.g., transgender (Fausto-Sterling 1993).

Western culture is committed to the ideas of only two sexes. Even the legal system has an interest in maintaining a "two-party sexual system," but according to Fausto-Sterling (1993), this two-party sexual system is in defiance of nature. Fausto-Sterling suggests there are many gradations running from biologically female to biologically male, and argues that along this spectrum lie at least five sexes, possibly even more [2].

Stereotyping

In recent years, the topic of sex-trait stereotypes has received considerable attention from researchers in the United States (Bergen & Williams 1991; Bledsoe 1983; Collins, Waters & Waters 1979). Most investigators have defined sex stereotypes as those traits said to be generally more characteristic of men than women or vice versa (Bem 1974; Constantinople 1973). The terms "masculinity"

and "femininity" are often employed with reference to self-perceptions and the degree to which stereotypical traits are incorporated into a persons' view of herself.

There may be a distinction between what individual members of a society define as masculine or feminine, and what they believe to be the prevailing standards in the culture at large. The BSRI (as well as gender schema theory, discussed later) is based on the prevailing definitions of masculinity and femininity in the culture at large, and serves as a gauge of gender conformity (Bem 1984:193).

Some researchers (c.f. Heilbrun 1976) have defined masculinity and femininity independently of sex stereotypes by basing their definition of the former solely on those traits women and men use with different frequencies in self-description. This allows for the possibility that different populations define masculinity and femininity in diverse ways. There is some evidence of differential self-attribution of gender between homosexuals and heterosexuals. For instance, Oldham, Farnill, and Ball's (1982) study with lesbian and heterosexual women concluded that the lesbian group scored significantly higher than heterosexual women on the total masculinity scale, but was not significantly different with respect to femininity. Other studies report lesbians as masculine (LaTorre & Wendenberg 1983; Oberstone & Sukonek 1976), less feminine (Ward 1974), and no difference between lesbians and heterosexual women (Storms 1980).

Sexual Orientation

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948; 1953), who argued that an individual's sexual orientation should be defined according to three dimensions of his or her

erotic experiences, laid the groundwork for sexual orientation identification. Kinsey saw sexual orientation as a bipolar continuum from heterosexuality to homosexuality, and argued that most people lie somewhere in the middle of the scale (bisexual) rather than at either extreme. Kinsey developed a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (exclusively heterosexual) through 6 (exclusively homosexual), with the mid-point of 3 representing equal amounts of heterosexual and homosexual experience (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin 1948).

The Kinsey Scale is often used to validate sexual orientation in studies of gays and lesbians (c.f. Vance & Green 1984). Most studies using the Kinsey Scale choose ratings of 4-6 as constitutive of homosexuality.

There are other ways of considering a person's sexual orientation. A case in point is Storms' work, which concluded that a two-dimensional model of sexual orientation, where homosexuality and heterosexuality are treated as separate, independent factors better explained a person's sexual orientation than does the unidemensional continuum model (1980). Unlike Kinsey, Storms distinguishes between those who identify as bisexual and asexual in sexual orientation. Storms also distinguishes between bisexual and asexual identities, arguing that failing to differentiate the two identities obscures results of sexual orientation research (1980:790).

Who is a Lesbian? Lesbian self-identification

> ***To Andromeda***
> *That country girl has witched your wishes, all dressed up in her country clothes and she hasn't got the sense to hitch her rags above her ankles.*
>
> *--Sappho*[3]

The term lesbian can be traced to the great Greek poet Sappho, who lived on the island of Lesbos around 600 BC. She is famous for the love poetry that she wrote to other women. Put simply, a lesbian is (as Sappho was) "a woman whose sexual orientation is toward other women" (Ferguson 1981).

Arguments over who and what makes a lesbian can be found in both modern and postmodern literature. The question of who are genuine lesbians has perplexed dominant, hetero-cultures and lesbians themselves. In the early part of the 20th century, lesbians followed their leanings toward same-sex attractions and were supported in the growing lesbian community.

For lesbians, lesbianism has to do with affiliation and the possibilities of sexual and intimate relations with other women. It is not uncommon for a woman coming into a lesbian identity to look for role models with whom she can identify. Finding women like herself for friendship as well as affirmation is an important part of learning about lesbian identity.

> *I have the best time with my femme friends and learn so much from them. Even though we're all different we have a lot of very important things in common*
>
> *(Elizabeth, 24)*[4]

So who is the one who defines lesbian, and who decides what a lesbian should "look" like? Does one lesbian's definition of herself create boundaries for another's definition? Julia Penelope (1984) has pointed out that the question of who is a lesbian is important to women wishing to define a space as "lesbian-only." It may also be important for individual women deciding who they are going to come out to or with whom they might consider having an intimate sexual relationship. In any regard, the definition of lesbian can be as global or as confining as needed by the person defining it.

Sexual identities are established with at least two conditions. According to Ferguson (1981), a person cannot be said to have a sexual identity that is not self-conscious. That is, taking on a lesbian identity is a self-conscious commitment or decision. A second condition for a self-conscious lesbian identity is that one live in a culture where the concept has relevance. For example, a person cannot have a lesbian identity unless the concept of lesbianism exists in the person's cultural environment.

Since lesbians often live without the approval or support of men, feminism with its focus on all women's needs and rights, often appeals to and is useful to them. Both heterosexual and lesbian feminists have remarked that lesbians are "the revolutionary vanguard of the women's movement" and "the most liberated women" (Abbott & Love, 1972:137).

Feminism

> *I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat....*
>
> *Rebecca West*[5]

Traditional (second-wave) feminism

The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s brought forth an examination of sexual politics in the "privacy of our kitchens and bedrooms" (Renzetti & Curran 1999:19), as well as in the public sphere. During the 1960s and 1970s, as the "personal" became "political," experiences of intimate relationships between men and women were brought into the gender debate (Stacey 1986:210).

The concept of feminism had and continues to have many different meanings to women. Three specific feminist paradigms from the 1960s were often referred to as liberal, radical, and socialist. Liberal feminism is rooted in a philosophy based on the principle of "individual liberty," where every person is allowed freedom of choice, equal opportunities and civil rights (Elliot & Mandell 1995:5). In short, liberal feminists attend to ending women's legal, economic and social dependency on men, including equal opportunities to education and training, open competition in the economic marketplace and legal guarantees of freedom of choice.

Radical feminists focus primarily on women's oppression under patriarchy, viewed as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege" (Eisenstein 1979:17). From this perspective, women's oppression is the most "widespread and deepest form of human oppression" (Elliot

& Mandell 1995:13). Radical feminists are particularly concerned with the patriarchal organization of the family and the control of women's sexuality

Socialist feminism calls for an understanding of the interdependence of capitalist and patriarchal organization of production and reproduction (Elliot & Mandell 1995:10). Included are analyses of intersections between class and gender oppressions in the marketplace, as well as ways in which women's reproduction work helps maintain the status quo.

Contemporary: postmodernism, colonial feminism

There are many different interpretations of the term "postmodern." Some define it narrowly, others broadly, and some avoid it all together. Andreas Huyssen (1990) describes postmodernism as a cultural form that came after modernism and in a contemporary postindustrial culture. Postmodernism, according to Huyssen, was facilitated in part by feminism and its impact on culture in general and gender specifically. The postmodern culture challenges imperialism and its ecological insensibility, as well as modernism's ethnocentric domination of others. Postmodern theory emerged as a critical response to belief, values, and ideals that came to dominate the modernist period.

Flax (1990) states:

> these modernist ideals and beliefs include the idea that individuals comprise stable, coherent, and rational subjects; that reason, with it's scientific laws, provides an objective, reliable, and universal basis for knowledge; that the rational use of scientific knowledge will lead to freedom and progress for everyone; and that such knowledge is neutral and socially beneficial (41).

Since the 1980s, many women have been exploring the implications of postmodernism for feminism. Postmodernism fit particularly well with critiques by women of color and women from developing countries, regarding the white, Western feminists' tendency to make universalized generalizations from limited perspectives. Postmodern feminists have no doubt that the needs of women are diverse and cannot be captured in any essentialist theory. For example, third world or colonial feminism, including that in many economically undeveloped and developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, typically focuses on imperialist oppression and on women's involvement in liberation movements in their respective countries. For many women in these countries, women's liberation is inseparable from their nation's liberation from Western imperialism or from political dictatorships (Mohanty 1991).

Third-wave Feminism

Currently evolving is the phenomenon of third wave feminism, sometimes referred to as *gender-rebellion feminism* (Lorber 1998). The focus here is on interrelationships among inequalities of gender, race and ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation. The focal point of third wave feminism is that gender inequality is only one piece of the complex system of social stratification. Third wave feminism can be seen as an umbrella term for forms of multiracial feminism, men's feminism, social construction feminism, postmodern feminism, and queer

theory. All branches of third wave feminism locate the diversity of people within cultural and structural contexts.

"Generational" Groups

In order to examine gender identity for each of the above mentioned feminism periods, the data were divided into three "generational" groupings. Each group consisted of lesbians who were in their twenties at some point in each time period (1950s & 1960s, 1970s & 1980s, and 1990s & 2000). The three time periods correspond to different periods of feminist philosophy and as such, have been labeled- pre-feminism, modern feminism, and postmodern feminism. It should be noted, though, that any inferences made from these data can only be speculative, as the respondents were only asked about their current gender identity.

Lesbian Feminism

> *Sappho was an educated woman at the time when most women could not read or write, a political exile, a mother, and one of the finest poets who ever lived. When virtually all women apparently lived to serve the male hierarchy and died anonymously without leaving a trace of their uniqueness, she said her name would live through history, and it has. Today she would be called a Feminist.*
>
> *Sidney Abbott & Barbara Love*[6]

Feminist groups in the 1960s and 1970s attracted many women who personally felt the impact of gender inequality, including many lesbians. Lesbian feminism emerged in the women's movement in the early 1970s (Stein 1992). Women who "came out through feminism" attempted to transform the definition of lesbianism from a medical condition or a sexual preference into a collective identity.

This collective identity as lesbian feminists was in part a repudiation of compulsory gender and sex roles. Today's lesbian "movement" also includes projects such as lesbian parenting groups, support groups for women with cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

Lesbian Roles and Relationships

Our society presents conformist, though increasingly problematized, gender roles to all males and females. The culture works to persuade and to prepare both males and females to base couple relationships not only on the existence of gender difference between the partners, but on the relational roles that society associates with appropriate male and female behavior (Slater 1995).

Lesbians cannot base their assignment of relational or sexual roles on sex differences or culturally prescribed gender differences between the partners. As two women, lesbian couples build from a proverbial clean slate, negotiating from scratch all aspects of the partner's roles. Individual abilities, interests, and tolerances form the basis for the complex construction of these couples' relational roles (Slater 1995).

As lesbians approach this task they are confronted with socially-imposed obstacles. One such obstacle is sexism. As a result of sexism in U.S. culture, typically male roles are "connoted as being specially skilled and important, while...female roles are evaluated to be more universally performable and of secondary status" (Slater 1995:47). Because of this cultural arrangement, a lesbian

partner who handles the domestic duties may feel subservient, while the partner who has a longer workday may feel differently entitled or empowered by her position.

Another example is the couple's efforts to define their roles as sexual partners differently from the common dichotomies between men and women. Lesbians typically work hard at avoiding fixed traditional roles of sexual aggressor and sexually pursued; instead, they are more likely to expect partners to initiate sex equally. In their relationships, many lesbians work hard to free themselves from pervasive gendered standards -- especially those lesbians who have been influenced by feminism (Slater 1995).

While the difficulties in designing roles in lesbian relationships cause ongoing stress, they offer opportunity as well. The ingeniousness lesbians must use to create relational roles allows each to sculpt the specifics of her coupled life in innovative ways. Lesbians may or may not settle for minor revisions in existing role distinctions, but at the same time, they may feel freer to consider radically different - and more personally satisfying - relational patterns.

Butches and Femmes

The categories "butch" and "femme" have historically served numerous functions in the lesbian world. These rigid role standards served as specific rules one had to adopt which consisted of not only external presentations, but internal convictions as well. For instance, a butch lesbian always knew that a real femme was a "gay girl who wanted her butch to look masculine but be a woman" (Cordova 1993:280). Another example of a butch rule is "honor your dyke buddies," in other

words, "don't make it with a buddy's girl and expect to keep her friendship" (Cordova 1993:281).

Before the 1960's, when the movement for gay liberation became explicitly political in organization and strategy, transgressing gender boundaries through rigid butch/femme role playing was one of the few ways to resist the dominant heterosexist ideology (Kennedy & Davis 1989). In her introduction to the anthology *Butch/Femme Reader*, Joan Nestle (1992) points out that this butch/femme subculture has been in existence for over a hundred years.

As a form of resistance, butch/femme can be seen as a role relationship that fills and is maintained by a collective need. As Stinchcombe (1968) expresses, butch/femme may be "maintained because [lesbians] have learned that they get good effects from the practice" (104). The butch/femme community provided support for and sustenance to the behavior. As Stinchcombe points out, "if a survival has been preserved because it fulfills a function, then it was probably originally established by search behavior for a pattern or activity which fulfilled it" (106). It could be argued that the butch/femme community still exists because of the function that it fulfills. There is a need for recognition of shared differences, that is, the knowledge that there are others like themselves, who understand the gender transgressions felt and lived out by many butch and femme lesbian women. Stinchcombe distinguishes this search pattern as a conscious attempt to "solve the problems posed by the need" (106), to know others like themselves - to be themselves. As expressed by one femme:

> *I am a very feminine female, a feminist, smart, sexy, nurturing, gentle and tough in equal measure, polite, observant, a little sarcastic, ... hard-working, loving, reserved, and passionate. ...femme's combine their female experiences/histories with their queer experiences/histories. I was out in high school and got a lot of support from older dykes in the town where I lived. I always knew that I dressed better than most of the other lesbians and on some level knew that I desired butches...(Elizabeth, 24)*[7]

Women report that they learned these roles from other lesbians, not men:

> *She took me under her wing and taught me all the things she thought were most important for a baby butch like me to know before embarking on such a dangerous and painful journey.*
>
> *Leslie Feinberg*[8]

Several historians have suggested that butch/femme identities and relationships were not an impersonation of heterosexuality, but rather unique patterns of intimacy. Grahn (1991), for example, argues that butches were not copying males, instead they were proclaiming "here is another way of being a woman" (169). Their cultural behavior was not based on the social and sexual models most lesbians grew up with, i.e. man and woman, but rather on internal, strongly felt forms of sexuality, such as butch sexuality and femme sexuality, and on a lesbian-generated cultural behavior.

The issue of lesbianism's relation to heterosexuality remains controversial (Phelan 1989). Femme women were enduring an attack on their sense of self and self-worth during the 1970s and 1980s by the anti-butch/femme gatherings of feminists, who were proclaiming the butch/femme dyad as oppressive. Butch women, on the other hand had a more acceptable persona -- that of the androgynous "dyke" (Phelan 1989).

Many lesbians remain tied to the gay liberation movement rather than to radical feminism, whether they consider themselves feminist or not. And many women remain in lesbian relationships of the sort labeled "butch/femme," which some feminists critique as an attempt to live "normal" (i.e., heterosexual) lives, with one partner being the classic female, and the other adopting the masculine role.

Butch/Femme lesbians today

During the 1940s and 1950s, and through the mid 1960s, butch/femme became a code identity for working-class lesbians (Burch 1998). Working-class women who wished to participate in lesbian groups often had to appear as butch or as femme to show that they understood the rules, and that they were a part of the group. Not uncommonly, middle-class lesbians were appalled by the appearance of masculinity and "exaggerated" femininity, and referenced rigid gender distinctions as mirrored images of heterosexual culture (Burch 1998:361).

Lesbian-feminist culture offered a new identity -- that of the androgynous, politically aware, and politically correct lesbian who wanted egalitarian sexual relationships -- and role-playing went underground within feminism. In the 1970s, lesbian-feminists wanted to create a new look, one that did not resemble the dominance of (hetero) sexuality. They created the "dyke" image, characterized by boots, jeans, "men's" shirts, short hair -- and, ideally, aggressive behavior. In effect, it meant that everyone in the lesbian feminist community looked like what had been previously called butch in the 1950s (Faderman 1992:581).

During the height of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, the butch/femme dyad was officially frowned upon by the most vocal elements of the lesbian communities (Faderman 1992). Lesbian feminists saw butch/femme relationships as an "imitation of heterosexuality," and regarded them as role relationships that acted out the oppression such couples had learned from the parent culture (Faderman 1992:580). There still were lesbians who maintained butch/femme relationships, and who felt that feminism had little to do with them, or who had never heard of lesbian-feminism, and its belief that these roles were politically incorrect. These women continued to live as they always had (Faderman 1992:582).

Lesbians, who claimed butch or femme identities during the 1980s and into the 1990s, often see themselves as "taboo-smashers" and "iconoclasts" (Faderman 1992:586). There has been something of a revival of the often-criticized role-playing:

> Although the codes are less strict nowadays, in one way or another many lesbians continue to explore the butch-femme evocation of assertiveness and receptivity, its celebration of 'difference in women's textures' and its particular forms of courageous eroticism.
>
> (Boston Women's Health Collective 1984:149)

According to Faderman (1992), butch/femme lesbians are no longer only from the working-class, like those from the 1950s and 1960s, but may also be intellectuals whose "roots [are] in the middle class" (Faderman 1992:587).

The historical figure of the butch has been recreated into the "warrior against male chauvinism," replacing for some the dyke of the 1970s (Faderman 1992:588). The 1980s and 1990s butch is defined as:

> The woman who doesn't automatically smile and shuffle for every man she encounters. The woman who walks for her own purpose and not for the other people's entertainment. The woman who looks both capable of defending herself and ready to do so. The woman who does not obey. The woman who is in revolt against enforced femininity, who claims for herself the right not to dress and act and talk 'like a woman' (meaning like a toy)
>
> Faderman 1992:587-88

Even though the butch image has maintained a powerful woman persona, not many women today are willing to call themselves femmes. As much as the radical femmes insist to the contrary, it seems that the term "femme" is still associated with femininity, connoting weakness and vulnerability. Many lesbians are too familiar with the image of stereotypical powerlessness to be able to believe in the image of femme strength.

In the new postmodern lesbian discourse, butch/femme arrangements are seen as flexible, sometimes playing upon gendered identity (Butler 1990). Some lesbians testify that butch/femme relationships are conducted with a sense of lightness. Lyon (1987) characterizes contemporary butch/femme women as "playing at it rather than being it". Lesbians may agree to the play and recognize it as a pleasurable game: "She really can find a spark plug, she just prefers not to. Feeling that I have to protect her is an illusion that I enjoy. She allows me the illusion for she enjoys being taken care of like this" (Faderman 1992:593). Even heterosexual

relationships have been altered from the influences of 1970s feminism, with roles legitimately taking on all manners of androgynous nuances. Lesbians who identify as butch or femme today have the choice of expressing themselves in a variety of images: aggressive butch, passive butch, baby butch, stone butch, clone butch, old-fashioned femme, aggressive femme, and so on (Faderman 1992:591). It is also not unusual for the dress of both butch and femme lesbians to be unisex in style. The more egalitarian day-to-day arrangements that feminism brought seem to be reflected in butch/femme relationships of today.

Kendall, who identifies as femme, states,

> *I could do all the things my lover does and still not be butch. It has to do with receptivity and vulnerability; femmes also tend to be more manipulative, willing to express emotions, more concerned with relationships. The butch is the push; the femme is the pull"*
>
> (Faderman 1992:592)

There is also flexibility in dress today; the butch lesbian can enjoy wearing a long dress and do most of the cooking and cleaning chores in the home she shares with a woman who calls herself a femme, who is more career-orientated. Butch and femme today are flexible terms. At an event in a lesbian community recently, Faderman (1992:594) reports a butch wore "a tuxedo with a matching shade of eye shadow, and a necklace along with a bow tie". Today, apparently, a woman is a butch or femme because she says she is.

Therefore, the "do-or-die" identities, so common among 1950s butch and femme lesbians, may now have an erotic dimension and serve as an escape from the

boring "vanilla sex" associated with lesbian-feminism of the 1970s. That is, the purpose of butch/femme lesbian identity of today may be to create erotic tensions instead of rigid roles in a relationship. This sense of play and flexibility is a far cry from the sexual dynamic of the old butch/femme relationships of the past.

Identity and Role Theories

Identity theory was largely developed from symbolic interactionism, and view society as a social network of interpersonal relationships, with the self as a product of these relationships (Stryker & Serpe 1982). The self, according to Stryker and Serpe, develops through the process of knowing "who and what we are through interactions with others" (202). Building on these assumptions, identity theory, then, attempts "to deal with a set of empirical issues," refining the basic conceptions of symbolic interactionism with an "eye toward making tractable the measurement of variables implied by these conceptions" (205).

The sociological study of the self focuses on the relationship between role and identity as the key to explaining how the individual is connected to the larger social structure (Callero 1994). Identities are reflexively applied cognitions in the form of answers to the question "Who am I?" That is, "... there is an intimate relationship between the role and identity, emphasized in the term 'role-identity,'" (Burke & Reitzes 1991). According to Burke and Reitzes (1991): "Persons...use their identities as reference points to assess the implications of their own behavior as well as of other people's behaviors" (242). Sustaining and verifying one's identity in a group requires not only behavior on the part of the individual that confirms his or

her identity, but also that the behavior is interpreted and accepted by others (the reference group). In other words, the behaviors of others confirm the individual's identity. For individuals who identify with a particular role, behavior meanings tend strongly to match identity meanings.

Collier (2000) states that it is not only knowledge about a role that promotes identity formation, it is the actual experience of group members utilizing the role as a resource to accomplish valued interactions that gives role identity meaning. Similar to Burke's control system model, Collier's differentiated model sees identity formation in terms of a feedback loop.

The differentiated model (see Appendix A) asserts that role "meaning will be determined by how the role is being used by the [reference] group". Individuals have an internal role standard - based on a shared meaning of the role within an appropriate reference group. She cognitively compares her current identity state (i.e. a vision of self in a role, based on feedback from others) with her role standard. If these don't match, she tries to reduce the discrepancy through role-related interactions with others from her reference group. This changes the feedback she receives from others, which subsequently reduces the discrepancy between identity and standard.

Lesbian identity formation through the lens of the differentiated model

Identity formation is key to understanding different meanings to a role. For instance, Kennedy and Davis (1989) note that transgressing gender boundaries through rigid butch/femme role playing in the 1950s was one of the few ways to

resist the dominant heterosexist ideology. Faderman also affirms this opposition to heterosexist ideology, stating that role-playing was seen as a part of the working-class lesbian culture (1991)[9].

Identification can be affected when a group changes the meaning of that role. The feminist argument (see, for example, Nestle 1992), particularly popular in the 1970s and early 1980s, was that butch/femme role-playing among lesbians belonged to an "old" pattern of heterosexual behavior that should be discarded in favor of a new identity as a "feminist woman." This argument was built on the assumption that what is oppressive about heterosexual roles is the emphasis on difference. In certain contexts (e.g., patriarchal structures, capitalist societies), difference implies hierarchy, and equality depends on the elimination of difference in everything from appearance to sexual roles. During the 1970s, a woman who belonged to the lesbian community and identified as *femme* might have found that in this community, the femme identity came to be seen as oppressive. She had to decide if she was going to change her role-identity to continue as a member of this community, or locate a reference group that shared the same meaning of femmes as her. Feminist devaluation of lesbian butch/femme roles not only failed to take into account the importance of these roles for working-class and other marginalized women, but it also failed to see in such role-playing the potential of exposing all gender roles as a masquerade (Case 1993). This feminist critique of butch/femme relationships, according to Butler (1990), was grounded on the faulty assumption that there is an

"original" to be imitated, when in fact all gender roles are an imitation for which there is no original.

Lesbian-feminists in the 1970s typically argued against all role-playing and in favor of dissolving gender distinctions and replacing them with androgynous models (Goodloe 1993). Nevertheless, the continuing existence of butch/femme role playing in the 1970s and 1980s was a sign that the feminist campaign against role-playing had not been entirely successful. By the 1980s there were at least two alternative lesbian reference groups - "butch/femme" and "feminists."

Collier's differentiated model, which emphasizes "reference groups" as an important part to a role standard and as a source of relevant feedback, can be used to explain lesbian identity formation. Gender identity can be perceived as a feedback process in which current perceptions are matched with an underlying gender identity standard. Roles are expected ways of behaving that are attached to positions in society, and behavior is enacted along lines that result in the best match between role and self.

As stated above there are different dimensions of a role's meaning, and different groups weigh these dimensions differently according to the shared meaning of the group. A good example would be the woman who "comes out" as stated above, I'll call her Maibel. As Maibel is newly identifying herself as a lesbian, she looks for a social group that matches her meaning of what a lesbian is. Maibel's in her fifties, and comes out to some lesbians she knows from work. The only understanding Maibel has of "being a lesbian" was from her childhood (butch/femme

lesbians of the 1950s). Maibel notices that the lesbians she's in contact with do not hold to her meaning of lesbian. She may try to change her identity to match the group's meaning of the role lesbian.

Maybe she is too private, while the group focuses on public recognition. Because Maibel's self-image does not match the role standard, she must try and make adjustments to bring about greater agreement between self and role on each dimension. This is known as a state adjustment process.

Maibel tries to adapt, but never feels comfortable with this group's meanings of lesbian and therefore must move to what Collier (2000) describes as an *alternative* reference group. This time she finds a group of lesbians who are her same age and also share the same meaning of the role lesbian.

Colliers' (2000) differentiated model illustrates the process of finding an identity and a group who share the same meaning of an identity. As Maibel was trying to find a group that shared her meaning of lesbian she kept going around and around the differentiated model's wheel, trying to adapt her meanings to better match the group's, but still initially felt uncomfortable. In the act of finding a group that shared the same meaning of lesbian as Maibel, she had to leave the first group and their meaning of a lesbian role.

Now Maibel is comfortable in her identity as a lesbian because now she has found a group that gives her feedback that she's a lesbian "just like they are!!"

This example illustrates the point that there is more than one meaning of lesbian identity. There also may be more than one meaning of masculinity and

femininity within differing gender identities (butch/femme) and with different groups (specifically homosexual and heterosexual women).

Sex-Typing and Sex Role inventories: Theory and Research

Sex-Typing - what is it?

There are numerous theories that address the origins, development, and maintenance of behavioral and personality differences between men and women. One set of theories, the psychoanalytic/identification theories, focuses on personality development with an emphasis on early parent-child relationships. A second set of theories focuses on the effects of social structural and cultural arrangements on the development and maintenance of gender roles and stereotypes. A third set of theories proposes an evolutionary framework to explain differences between males and females. This perspective holds that differences between men and women have a "genetic basis and have arisen through adaptation" (Lips 1997:75).

Bridging the psychoanalytic and structural/cultural perspectives is the social-psychological theoretical focus on social learning or socialization. Social learning theory generally proposes that early sex-typing stems from differential reinforcement, observational learning, and/or same sex modeling. Serbin *et al.* (1993) suggests that social learning and cognitive development occur simultaneously, but they are associated with different aspects of the process of gender role adoption. The latter refers to *cognitive* aspects of gender-typing (e.g., knowledge of stereotypes), and the former involves *affective* dimensions of gender-typing (e.g., preference for sex-appropriate activities) (Lips 1997:64).

Bem (1984) prefers a more general definition of sex-typing, indicating that sex-typing is the "psychological process whereby, male and female children become 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (181). However, she also employs a cognitive development framework in suggesting that as they seek out the "correct" way to behave, children at the ages of 6 to 7 pass through a stage of gender role rigidity. One example of role rigidity would be that a child would not believe that a woman could become a medical doctor.

No theory adequately explains all dimensions of the acquisition or maintenance of gender or gender roles. But together they do provide a basis to begin an analysis, and are useful in that they give rise to questions that can be explored.

Sex Role Inventories and Their Use (what, how used)

The concepts of masculinity and femininity have intrigued social scientists for decades. Much research has been shaped by the belief that masculinity and femininity are polar opposites. Two of the earliest researchers to attempt to measure masculinity and femininity were Lewis Terman and his colleague, Catherine Cox Miles (1936). Their Attitude Interest Analysis Survey (AIAS) was not based on the "essence" of masculinity and femininity, but on the statistical measurability of sex differences in responses to particular questions. It is interesting to note that Terman and Miles' AIAS model gave femininity points through wrong answers (such as answering that Cain killed Goliath), while masculinity points were gained by giving the correct answers!

The belief that masculinity and femininity, as role behaviors, are mutually exclusive and are assigned to males and females, respectively, underwent extensive modifications during the 1970s. Many researchers, for example, have argued that masculinity and femininity are not polar opposites of a single dimension (Spence Helmreich, & Stapp 1975; Bem 1974; Block 1973; Constantinople 1973; Carlson 1971), and have instead advanced the notion that a person of either sex may develop both masculine and feminine attributes. It is the latter sex-role outcome, identified as *psychological androgyny*, which provides possibilities for both sexes to embody both masculine and feminine characteristics.

BSRI: Theory and Research

Bem's Gender Schema Theory

A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual's perception of phenomena. Gender schema theory proposes that an individual is expected to match the template defined as sex appropriate by their culture. That is, "they become sex-typed - in part because they have learned to sort information into equivalence classes, to evaluate their adequacy as persons, and to regulate their behavior on the basis of gender rather than other available dimensions" (Bem 1984:196).

A schema functions as an anticipatory structure, an ability to "search for and assimilate incoming information" in schema-relevant terms (Bem 1984:187). Bem's schematic information processing is therefore highly selective and enables an individual to bring structure and meaning to a vast array of incoming stimuli. More

specifically, schematic information processing involves a facility to sort information into categories on the basis of some particular dimension, despite the influences of other dimensions that could serve equally well (Bem 1984:187).

Bem (1984) argues for a conception of sex-role development that progresses along two independent behavioral sex-role tracks. A child, boy or girl, in the course of development may learn masculine sex-role behaviors and feminine sex-role behaviors, or both.

It is important to note that gender schema theory is a theory of process, not content. Because sex-typed individuals are seen as processing information and regulating their behavior according to definitions of femininity and masculinity their culture provides, it is the process of dividing objects into feminine and masculine categories - and not the content of the categories - that is central to the gender schema theory (Bem 1984:188).

Sex-typed and cross-sex-typed individuals

The BSRI facilitates the identification of individuals who spontaneously organize information on the basis of gender. Because they sort the items on the BSRI into gender categories when describing themselves, sex-typed individuals should be highly gender schematic. Unfortunately, no such indisputable statement can be made about cross-sex-typed individuals. Like sex-typed individuals, cross-sex-typed individuals also spontaneously sort items on the BSRI into masculine and feminine categories, but unlike sex-typed individuals, they also rate the sex-incongruent set as more self-descriptive. Hence no clear prediction can be made

about the gender schematicity of this group (Bem 1984:195). Consequently, according to Bem, it is only sex-typed individuals who are motivated to restrict their behavior in accordance with cultural definitions of gender appropriateness (207).

Critiques of Bem's BSRI

Heilbrun (1976) and Spence *et al.* (1975) have pointed out that the BSRI instrument ignored individuals who scored low in both masculinity and femininity. Later, with an awareness of behavioral differences between those who score high on both the masculinity scales and the femininity scales, and those who scored low on both scales, called for a scoring procedure that yielded four rather than three distinct groups of individuals (Bem 1977). Bem labeled those scoring low on both the masculinity and femininity scales "undifferentiated."

Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) argued that the BSRI is *atheoretical*: "Instead of defining the domains of masculinity and femininity and attempting to construct measures consistent with the definitions, Bem has chosen a strictly empirical approach" (998), an approach that was "destined to fail" (1012). Bem responded to this criticism by pointing out that her theory argues precisely that sex-typed individuals will conform to the definitions of masculinity and femininity that the culture provides. If a culture groups a "hodgepodge" of attributes together and calls them "femininity," for example, then that hodgepodge is what sex-typed women of that culture will take as the standard for their behavior (Bem 1979:1049). The purpose, then, of the BSRI is to discriminate between those who identify with this hodgepodge and those who do not.

Another criticism was that the BSRI does not allow for changes in definitions of femininity and masculinity. Responding to this issue, Beldsoe (1983) conducted a test of the validity of the BSRI. His sample consisted of 44 white female teachers of grades 7 and 8 from six school systems in New York. While his findings generally confirmed the construct validity of the BSRI, he added that some adjectives no longer appear to be perceived as characteristic of men and women.

In another study, Waters, Waters, and Pincus (1977) analysis yielded four factors based on the responses of 252 college students. One factor represented the sex of the respondent, one factor reflected an expressive, "affective orientation" defined by 14 of the 20 feminine items, and two factors depicted primarily masculine sex-typed items (dominant/aggressive/leadership and independent/self-sufficient). Collins, Waters, and Waters (1979) factor analyzed Bem's 40 adjectives or phrases with results almost parallel to those of Waters and colleagues (1977). One of the factors also represented the biological sex of the respondent. A second factor likewise represented an expressive, affective orientation. The other two factors were characterized by masculine sex-typed items (independence/self-sufficient/individuality and leadership/aggressiveness/forceful).

Other Sex Role Inventories

There have been many research procedures employed to study the degrees of masculinity and femininity in men and women. Different instruments used to measure masculinity and femininity include Bem's Sex-role Inventory (Bem 1974), the Personality Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp 1974), the

Adjective Checklist Masculinity and Femininity Scales (Heilbrun 1976), the Socially Undesirable Sex-correlated Characteristics Scale (Kelly, Caudill, Hathorn, & O'Brien 1977), the Personality Research Form Androgyny Scale (Berzins, Weilling, & Wetter 1978) and the Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan 1979). Each scale contains a list of adjectives or phrases that measure whether the adjective is more frequently associated with men or with women. While there are slight variations, these instruments appear to be more similar than different.

Relevant research on lesbians and gay men

Increasingly, studies of sex roles and gender attributes have included comparisons of homosexuals with heterosexuals. Some studies have found that lesbians had higher masculinity scores than heterosexual women, but that lesbians and heterosexual women had similar femininity scores (Finlay & Scheltema 1991; LaTorre & Wendenberg 1983; Oldham, Farnill, & Ball 1982; Oberstone & Sukonek 1976). Finlay and Scheltema (1991) further state that some gender identity studies with lesbian subjects show inconsistencies in the comparisons of femininity measures, but a more consistent finding of higher masculinity scores and greater androgyny among lesbians than heterosexual women. Other studies have reported no discrepancies between women of differing sexual orientation on masculinity, femininity, or androgyny scores (Stokes, Kilmann, & Wanlass 1983; Jones & DeCecco 1982; Storms 1980). Such inconsistencies indicate that at the least, gender identity measures across sexual orientations are problematic. Indeed, Hawkins,

Herron, Gibson, Hoban, and Herron (1988) tested six sex-role scales with both heterosexual and homosexual men and women. From their findings, they concluded that some scales should not be used interchangeably. That is, whether male (and female) homosexuals differ from male (and female) heterosexuals on masculinity (and femininity) measures depended on the scale being used. The same is true for differences in same-sex, mixed-sex, and cross-sex-typing. Differences between the results of specific studies can also be attributed in part to sampling differences, as well as to polarization of sexual identity, i.e., homosexual vs. heterosexual. Most studies treat homosexuals and heterosexuals as relatively distinct and homogenous groups, when in fact there are bisexuals (and other emerging sexual identities), and there is considerable heterogeneity within each group.

Conclusion

Ponse (1980) notes that gender identity, sex-role identity, and sexual object choice are presumed in our society to be related in a highly consistent manner such that, given one of the elements, the others are expected to be compatible. Thus, a female is expected to be predominantly feminine in the performance of her sex-related roles and to orient her sexual preference toward men. This becomes problematic when a woman chooses another woman for her sexual object choice. How are sex-related roles (that orient women toward men) expressed when she chooses another woman? Not only do homosexual women differ from the norm in the obvious area of sexual object choice, but they may also exhibit other gender-

inappropriate characteristics (Stokes *et al.* 1983). This research examines these gender identities and inconsistencies in a sample of lesbian women.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The central research question had to do with self- and stereotypically-gendered identities of lesbians. The purpose was to determine the nature and form of gender identity and gender stereotypes among women who self-identified as lesbians, and more specifically to determine whether or not "gender" meant the same thing to lesbians as it did to heterosexual women. Stereotypical heterosexual gender traits are known well in Western culture; for example, if asked whether the adjective "submissive" describes the "feminine" or the "masculine," most people would have little trouble in answering. As described in Chapter 1, on the other hand, lesbian gender is problematized, confounded by heterosexist assumptions about homosexuality and by the experiences of lesbians themselves. Studies comparing gender identity of lesbians with heterosexual women find there is inconsistency in femininity measures (Finlay & Scheltema 1991), but more consistent findings of higher masculinity scores among lesbians than heterosexual women.

The present study utilized Bem's Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) as the instrument and model for examining gender among a sample of lesbians. The BSRI was designed to "assess the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable female and male attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description" (Bem 1979:1048). It is composed of personality characteristics that are seen as both positive in value (for at least one of the sexes) and either masculine or feminine in manner. Twenty of the characteristics are stereotypically feminine (e.g., affectionate,

gentle, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others), and twenty are stereotypically masculine (e.g., ambitious, self-reliant, independent, assertive).

Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of four parts: an inventory of gender identity; a scale measuring self-attribution (butch-femme); butch/femme opinion questions; and demographic questions (see Appendix B). Bem's Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was used in this study to measure gender-role identification with a sample of women who self-identify as lesbian. The BSRI treats masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions and thereby, characterizing a person as masculine or feminine based upon her self-identification with specific gendered personality characteristics. Replication using the original Inventory was as follows: the subjects were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale how descriptive each of Bem's gendered personality characteristics is of themselves.

Bem (1977) advocates that median scores for masculinity and femininity be derived from groups composed of equal numbers of males and females. In light of the fact that my subjects were all self-identified lesbians, cut-off points were generated based upon combined median scores from two studies that used the BSRI (as shown in Table 1). This combined group is hereafter referred to as the referent group.

Table 1. Referent Group (N= 977)*

Masculine		Feminine	
Mean	4.80	Mean	4.79
Median	4.77	Median	4.82
SD	0.31	SD	0.42

* Bem (1974) N = 917; Hawkins *et al.* (1988) N = 60

The experimental and referent groups were not precisely matched in age or education levels, but the inter-group differences on these variables were small.

The first part of the survey instrument contained the 40 gendered (20 feminine and 20 masculine) items from the BSRI, and directions for indicating whether they were: always true; almost always true; sometimes true; neutral; sometimes not true; almost never true; and never true of the subject's description of herself. Bem (1974) states that the BSRI features sex-typed standards that are considered (by respondents in her studies) to be socially desirable for males and females respectively. The twenty neutral traits in the BSRI were not used in this study. Scoring was as follows: a masculinity score and a femininity score were derived on the basis of each person's self-attributions. In prior research using the BSRI, subjects were typically placed into one of four categories based on the relationships of their score to the group median score. A subject was sex-typed masculine if she scored above the median on masculinity and below the median on femininity. A subject was sex-typed feminine if she scored below the median on masculinity and above the median on femininity. A subject was androgynous if she scored above the median on both masculinity and femininity, and those scoring below the median on both masculinity and femininity were labeled undifferentiated.

The Bem Sex-role Inventory was administered and scored according to instructions provided by its author, with sex-role category determined by the median-split procedure. Respondents also selected on a separate scale, a butch-femme continuum, the place on the continuum that best fits with their orientation identity.

Respondents' BSRI scores were then compared to their self-ratings on the butch-femme continuum. It was expected that the respondents who identified with the "butch" end of the continuum would score higher on Bem's masculinity scale than those who placed themselves on the "femme" side.

Finally, data were collected on respondents' age, race, level of education, and income.

Pre-test

A pre-test of the instrument was conducted to test its readability (see Appendix C for the complete pre-test questionnaire form). Pre-test subjects were four self-identified lesbian acquaintances with a mean age of 43.3, mean income of $25,000, education level average of "some college", all were White.

All of the subjects agreed the directions were adequate, but two women remarked that ratings for some of the personality characteristics were situational. For instance, the self-attribution of "flatterable" would depend on who the "flatterer" was and the situation in which the flattering was done. Another woman noted that "acts as a leader" and "has leadership qualities" (two separate items) were really the same to her.

There was some concern regarding the original formation of the butch-femme question that read: *Which of the following best describes yourself*? The selection of possible answers were: (1) butch; (2) femme; (3) masculine; (4) feminine; (5) none of the above. Two of the pre-test respondents answered "none of the above," one scratched out "none of the above" and replaced it with "all of the above," and one added a sixth answer of "all of the above." A suggestion was made to move the "masculine" and "feminine" options back into the section asking for responses to the BSRI and to replace the question with a Likert scale of "Butch ———————— Femme;" these changes were made for the final questionnaire.

Sample

The total sample consisted of 65 women. While it is customary in the literature to determine sexual orientation by Kinsey Scale scores the participants in this study were women who "self-identify" as lesbians. It should be noted that when a study has used the Kinsey scale to confirm lesbian status (cf. Vance & Green 1984), the majority of the self-identified subjects have obtained the required score.

Data for this study were gathered in the spring of 2000, in the greater Portland metropolitan area, using the nonprobability sampling technique of snowballing. This process was appropriate for this type of study since members of this population are difficult to locate. Initial recruiting was done with students at Portland State University who were members of the Queers & Allies Organization (n = 6), and the Lesbian Community Project of Portland (n = 23). These women

were asked to identify other potential participants as well as to participate in the study. I also provided personal friends copies of the survey to give to their friends.

Additionally, I made surveys available at a Women's Studies - and Lesbian Community Project-sponsored event featuring lesbian-feminist Alex Dobkin (see Appendix 3). The Lesbian Community Project hosted an informal potluck and panel discussion between Dobkin and other lesbians about their experiences as lesbians in the 1960's and 70's. During the potluck dinner, I noticed that no one had picked up my survey questionnaire, so my life-partner and I started "canvassing" the tables introducing both ourselves and my research and inviting everyone at the table to fill out the questionnaire. By the end of the night, 23 had completed questionnaires and handed them back to us, and 10 had taken questionnaires with them.

Another group of lesbians, members of Lesbians over 50, heard about my research through an acquaintance and wanted to participate in the study, thinking the voices of older lesbians needed to be heard. It is hard to tell how many in the total sample came from this group, but the mean age of the total sample was close to 45.4.

Thirty-six surveys were either handed to me in person, or dropped off at the Sociology Department. Twenty-nine of the survey forms came to me by return mail. Inspection of zip codes showed that 24 were from within the Portland area, with two from Eugene, one from Salem, and one from Yakima, WA.

Statistical Analysis

Demographic data

Descriptive statistics provided demographic data on the sample and information about the central tendency and variability of the gender data. Participants provided information regarding age, income (represented by 7 intervals ranging from < $10,000 to > $100,000), education (represented by 7 intervals ranging from grade school to post doctorate). Race was represented by the categories of White, Native American, African American, and Other (write-ins included Pakistani bi-racial, Italian, Jewish and Bohemian). Each participant rated herself on the 40 items of the Bem scales on a range from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). The butch/femme scale interval rating was 1 (butch) to 10 (femme), with 5 representing neutral (neither butch nor femme).

Data on research questions

Research Question 1

Is the BSRI a valid measure of femininity and masculinity within a lesbian context?

A list of the adjectives or phrases and their scale assignment, (means and standard deviations) was generated to observe similarities and differences between masculine and feminine attributes. Comparisons were made between the BSRI findings on this lesbian sample and prior BSRI findings on heterosexual samples. Additionally, findings on the BSRI items were broken down by respondent's age and analyzed as to their generational variation.

Masculinity and femininity traits were also analyzed following Wheeless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) factor analytic procedure, using principal components technique followed by varimax rotation (Blanchard-Fields, Suhrer-Roussel & Hertzog 1994). An eigenvalue cutoff of 1.0 and the scree test were chosen to determine the number of factors to extract. The criterion of a minimum of .50 loading was used to determine what items loaded on each factor.

Research Question 2

Are masculinity and femininity categories, as framed by Bem, consistent with lesbian identities of butch and femme?

The final research question called for comparisons between the self-orientation rating (butch-femme) and the individual's masculinity and femininity scores. The butch/femme scale was collapsed and dichotomized (1-4 = butch; and 6-10 = femme), and compared to the masculinity and femininity scores. A paired-sample T-test was computed to define the means and standard deviations (s.d.) for masculinity and femininity scores for both butch lesbians and femme lesbians. Finally, these data were controlled for particular demographic traits.

Limitations of the methodology

The survey questionnaire was limited in the amount and nature of the information that could be extracted for the three research questions. Testing the validity of a sex-role inventory, by comparing of women who identify as lesbians with subjects in prior studies who were presumably heterosexual in orientation, may be problematic. That is, the presumption of heterosexuality may be faulty. Also, the

present sample were all women and Bem's (1974) research specifically required the use of men and women in the generation of scale scores.

Additionally, cross-sectional research such as this study examines self-descriptions as at one point in time. As such, they fail to capture the dynamic quality of self-identity.

The non-random sample limits generalizability. The demographic characteristics of this particular sample are also limiting. Most of the women were white (85%). They were predominantly in their 40's, affiliated with lesbian social organizations, and within the lower to middle income bracket.

Finally, making inferences about historical and generational identities from a sample of women, who were only asked to identify characteristics that define them now, is relatively speculative.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Description of the sample

As shown in Table 2 the sample consisted primarily of White women (85%), about half of whom were between ages 40 and 59. Regarding education, the women were most likely to have a high school education, and second most likely to have some college, 35% and 29% respectively. Incomes were relatively low, with the largest portion (28%) in the $20,001 to $30,000 income bracket.

Table 2. Profile of the sample on selected sociodemographic traits (N = 65)

	N	%
Race		
White	55	85
Women of Color	8	12
Total	62	100
Age		
20-39	24	37
40-59	32	49
60-80	9	14
Total	65	100
Education		
Grade school	3	5
Highschool/GED	23	35
Some college	19	29
Bachelor	15	23
Master	3	5
Doctorate	2	3
Total	65	100
Income		
$0-$10,000 per annum	9	14
$10,001-$20,000 per annum	8	12
$20,001-$30,000 per annum	18	28
$30,001-$40,000 per annum	14	21
$40,001-$60,000 per annum	3	20
$60,001-$100,000 per annum	2	3
Over $100,001 per annum	0	
Total	64	100

The BSRI

Each participant rated herself on the 40 gendered personality characteristics in the BSRI. A masculine-typed gender role represents the endorsement of masculine attributes and the simultaneous rejection of feminine attributes. Similarly, a feminine-typed gender role represents the endorsement of feminine attributes and the concurrent rejection of masculine attributes. Based on responses, each woman received three major scores: a Masculinity score, a Femininity score, and, an Androgyny score. The Masculinity and Femininity scores indicate the extent to which a person endorses masculine or feminine personality characteristics as self-descriptive (Bem 1974:158)

The actual Femininity and Masculinity score were calculated by averaging the score for the 20 femininity items and the 20 masculinity items, respectively (Bem 1974). Subtracting the Masculinity score from the Femininity score produces the Androgyny score. As an Androgyny score nears zero, the more a person is androgynous, i.e., the more equal the endorsement of both masculine and feminine personality characteristics. High positive scores represent femininity and high negative scores represent masculinity.

Bem's (1974) Masculinity and Femininity scores were calculated from responses of a sample containing equal numbers of males and females. Since the sample for this study consisted only of women, a referent group was created combining subjects from prior studies (Bem (1974) and Hawkins *et al.* (1988)). Table 3 shows a comparison of Masculinity and Femininity scores from the current

research group (N = 65) and the referent group, composed of 977 male and female college students.

Table 3. Current research group (CG) and referent group (RG) means, medians, and standard deviations

Masculinity	CG	RG	Femininity	CG	RG
Mean	5.27	4.80	Mean	5.07	4.79
Median	5.44	4.77	Median	5.26	4.82
SD	.68	.31	SD	.78	.42

The current lesbian sample had higher means for both the Masculinity and Femininity scores than the referent group. The high Masculinity and Femininity means and medians for the current research group were the first suggestion of lesbians' greater tendency overall toward androgyny.

Research Question 1

Is the BSRI a valid measure of femininity and masculinity within a lesbian context?

Bem (1977) advocates the use of the median-split method to classify respondents as androgynous, masculine typed, or feminine typed. The median, which represents the 50th percentile, is the "middlemost score in an ordered set of scores" (Sprinthall 1987:421). It is the most valid measure of central tendency (compared to the mean and the mode) whenever the distribution is skewed. In a normal distribution, the mean coincides with the median.

It is noteworthy to point out the greatest difference, as shown in Table 3, is between the current research Femininity mean and median (along with the highest

standard deviation). This suggests that the distribution of the lesbians' Femininity scores is skewed.

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations of the current sample's self-ratings on the 20 masculine and 20 feminine items. A 7-point scale was utilized, with 7 indicating the highest self-attribution.

Table 4. Feminine and masculine items: Means and standard deviations (N = 65)

Feminine Items	M	SD	Masculine Items	M	SD
Loyal	6.23	.87	Defends own beliefs	6.09	.74
Compassionate	5.93	.78	Independent	6.02	.97
Understanding	5.81	.74	Competitive	5.93	.78
Sympathetic	5.79	.80	Self-reliant	5.91	.89
Sensitive to the needs of others	5.75	1.04	Self-sufficient	5.89	.82
Warm	5.74	.90	Willing to take a stand	5.89	.96
Affectionate	5.72	.84	Analytical	5.75	1.06
Gentle	5.58	.92	Individualistic	5.75	1.14
Tender	5.53	1.00	Has leadership qualities	5.60	1.03
Cheerful	5.26	.90	Strong personality	5.47	1.18
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	5.26	1.30	Willing to take risks	5.40	1.13
Loves children	5.21	1.50	Assertive	5.23	1.07
Yielding	4.51	1.13	Acts as a leader	5.19	.95
Shy	4.51	1.42	Ambitious	5.16	1.00
Flatterable	4.42	1.36	Makes decisions easily	4.82	1.26
Soft-spoken	4.30	1.55	Dominant	4.47	1.34
Feminine	4.26	1.63	Athletic	4.32	1.68
Does not use harsh language	4.21	1.83	Forceful	4.26	1.40
Childlike	3.82	1.54	Masculine	4.18	1.42
Gullible	3.65	1.78	Aggressive	4.09	1.52

As presented in Table 4, the highest average mean among feminine items was "loyal" (6.23). The two masculine items "defends own belief," and "independent" also had means above 6.00. A woman possessing these personality characteristics could be seen as independent and reliable, not reflective of the stereotypical man-like traits so commonly (and sometimes negatively) attributed to

lesbians. And potentially reflective of changes in culture since creation of the categories.

The items "feminine" and "masculine" were rated notably lower than most other items. The lowest masculine item mean, "aggressive" (4.09) was higher than the lowest feminine mean. Notable, however, that on all masculine and feminine items, the mean was higher than the mid-point of the scale (3.5)

Indeed, the mean for all items on the Femininity scale was high, and the mean for all the items on the Masculinity scale was slightly higher. As both of these overall means indicate, respondents were likely to see the items on both of these scales as fairly to very descriptive of themselves. Using Bem's (1974) suggestion for calculating an Androgyny score (discussed earlier), the total sample Androgyny score was -46, which places the group as a whole in the Androgyny category.

Table 5 compares the means of selected BSRI items for the current sample with those of Bledsoe's (1983) sample of 44 white female teachers. Here the greatest difference was on the item "masculine", where the mean for the current sample was twice that of Bledsoe's (1983) sample.

Table 5. Comparisons of findings by Van Belthowing and Bledsoe on selected items, by means

BSRI items	Van Belthowing (N = 65)	Bledsoe (N = 44)	Difference
Competitive	5.93	4.18	1.75
Willing to take risks	5.40	4.14	1.26
Shy	4.51	3.27	1.24
Feminine	4.26	5.87	-1.61
Masculine	4.18	2.09	2.09

The two highest means for the current sample were personality characteristics that are masculine, while the mean for the item "masculine" was lowest for the current sample (even lower than "feminine"). Interestingly, the mean for "shy" (a feminine item) was higher for the current lesbian sample than for Bledsoe's women teachers. Consequently, from the comparisons between the current study and Bledsoe's study, it can be stated that the current sample of lesbian women leans toward a masculine categorical status (Androgyny *t* ratio = -1.81), while Bledsoe's sample fit the feminine categorical status (Androgyny *t* ratio = 2.55).

The argument found in much of the literature that lesbians are more masculine than feminine (c.f., Bergen & Williams 1991) was partially supported here. The lesbian sample highly identified with Bem's masculine traits. Indeed, their mean masculinity item was higher than that of several other non-lesbians research groups. However, the lesbian identification with feminine items was also high, and higher than that of the comparison groups. Also, while the current sample rated the item "masculine" low in relation to other masculine items, the mean rating for the "masculine" item was double that of the comparison group. Finally, to be discussed more fully in the next, section, masculinity may be conceptualized differently by this lesbian sample than by others.

A factor analysis of the current research group's BSRI data was conducted to assess how consistent the theoretical factor structure was with the actual distribution in this sample. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted using the SPSS 8 statistical package. The loading criteria cutoff was .50

or above on the primary factor, and factors with fewer than 3 items were eliminated from consideration.

Using the loading criteria established by Blanchard-Fields and colleagues (1994), and based on the eigenvalues and rotated factor loadings with squared multiple correlations as initial communality estimates, the present study yielded eleven factors that provided the most parsimonious solution.

The initial analysis of the eleven-factor solution was compared with other studies that factor analyzed gender attribute data, such as Waters *et al.* (1977) and Collins *et al.* (1979). In general, the current research factor analysis replicated Collins *et al.*'s (1979) results with regard to the first two primary factors. A review of the literature (c.f., Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart 1981) offers nothing that would indicate the emergence of factors 3-11.

Eleven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 accounted for 75% of the variance. The scree method (Cattell 1966) suggested that a two-factor solution could be readily interpreted. The two-factor solution (with Varimax rotation) yielded eigenvalues of 18.61 and 13.71 and clearly represented the feminine and masculine scales, respectively. (See Appendix D for the current research factor loadings on all of Bem's (1974) personality characteristics.)

Using criteria loadings of .50 or above the items could be grouped into two categories described in Table 6.

Table 6. Masculinity and Femininity: Current sample factor loadings* on the BSRI

Masculine Items	Factor-loading	Feminine Items	Factor-loading
Independent	.77	Tender	.80
Strong personality	.76	Sympathetic	.79
Self-reliant	.68	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	.76
Defends own beliefs	.66	Gentle	.75
Self-sufficient	.61	Understanding	.72
Assertive	.60	Sensitive to the needs of others	.72
Willing to take a stand	.58	Warm	.67
Individualistic	.54	Affectionate	.65
		Loyal	.63
		Soft spoken	.59
		Compassionate	.55
		Gullible	.55
		Feminine	.53
		Yielding	.51

* Loadings of .50 or above

The first factor (Masculinity) consisted of eight clearly defined masculine items, and was labeled Masculinity, consistent with Bem (1974). The second factor consisted of 14 feminine items and was labeled Femininity, consistent with Bem (1974). Six feminine and twelve masculine items did not load significantly on either factor (See Appendix D for a complete list).

Factor 1: Masculinity

Using the 20 items Bem found to be socially desirable for men as the standard, the current research was compared with Ballard-Reisch and Elton's (1992) sample of 265 male and female volunteers and Wheeless and Dierks-Stewart's (1981) sample of 882 men and women. The first factor (see Table 7) for the current study was composed of 8 of Bem's original 20 masculine items.

Table 7. Comparative results of factor analyses items loading* on the masculine factor

Bem, 1974 (N = 723; r = .82)	Van Belthowing, 2000 (N = 63; r = .80)	Ballard-Reisch and Elton, 1992 (N = 265; r = .865)	Wheeless and Dierks-Stewart, 1981 (N = 882; r = .84)
Self-reliant	Self-reliant	-------	-------
Defends own beliefs	Defends own beliefs	-------	-------
Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent
Athletic	-------	-------	-------
Assertive	Assertive	Assertive	Assertive
Strong Personality	Strong Personality	Strong Personality	Strong Personality
Forceful	-------	Forceful	Forceful
Analytical	-------	-------	-------
Has leadership qualities	-------	Has leadership qualities	Has leadership qualities
Willing to take risks	-------	Willing to take risks	-------
Makes decisions easy	-------	-------	-------
Self-sufficient	Self-sufficient	Self-sufficient	-------
Dominant	-------	Dominant	Dominant
Masculine	-------	-------	-------
Willing to take a stand	Willing to take a stand	Willing to take a stand	Willing to take a stand
Aggressive	-------	Aggressive	Aggressive
Acts as a Leader	-------	Acts as a Leader	Acts as a Leader
Individualistic	Individualistic	Individualistic	-------
Competitive	-------	Competitive	Competitive
Ambitious	-------	-------	-------

* at .50 loading

Interestingly two items, "self-reliant" and "defends own beliefs," loaded on the current groups' factor, but not on those of the comparison groups. It could be suggested that the current lesbian sample has pinpointed personality characteristics that are most beneficial to withstand mainstream oppression without being domineering.

The Masculinity factor in this study included many of the same items endorsed in the research of Ballard-Reisch and Elton (1992), as well as that of Wheeless and Dierks-Stewart's (1981). However, in none of these three studies did

the Masculinity factor include Bem's (1974) "masculine," "makes decisions easily," "athletic," "ambitious," or "analytical" items.

Table 8 compares the factor loadings on the Masculinity factor items from the current research sample of lesbians, and factor loadings on the same items from Bledsoe's sample consisting of all women (1983).

Table 8. Van Belthowing's masculinity factor: Factor item loading* comparisons Bledsoe's research

Item name	Van Belthowing (2000) N = 65	Bledsoe (1983) N = 44
Independent	.77	<.50
Strong personality	.76	.77
Self-reliant	.68	<.50
Defends own beliefs	.66	.57
Self-sufficient	.61	<.50
Assertive	.60	.70
Willing to take a stand	.58	.62
Individualistic	.54	.57

* Loadings of .50 or above

For the current research group, eight masculine items had significant loadings (.50 or above) in the Masculinity factor; while only six of these items had significant loadings in Bledsoe's research findings. In most cases the factor loadings were higher for the current sample than for Bledsoe's - "strong personality," "willing to take a stand," and "individualistic" has slightly lower loadings.

Factor 2: Femininity

Again using Bem's list of 20 items found to be socially desirable for women as the standard, comparisons were made between the current and two other studies. Table 9 displays the findings from the current analysis and those of Ballard-Reisch & Elton's (1992) research and Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart's (1981). The analysis

revealed that all but six of Bem's 20 items yielded loadings of .50 or above in the current data.

Table 9. Comparative results of BSRI factor analyses: Items loading* on the femininity factor

Bem, 1974 (N = 723; r = .82)	Van Belthowing, 2000 (N = 63; r = .87)	Ballard-Reisch & Elton, 1992 (N = 265; r = .893)	Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart, 1981 (N = 882; r = .87)
Yielding	Yielding	-------	-------
Cheerful	-------	-------	Cheerful
Shy	-------	-------	-------
Affectionate	Affectionate	Affectionate	Affectionate
Flatterable	-------	-------	-------
Loyal	Loyal	-------	-------
Feminine	Feminine	-------	-------
Sympathetic	Sympathetic	Sympathetic	Sympathetic
Sensitive to the needs of others	Sensitive to the needs of others	Sensitive to the needs of others	Sensitive to the needs of others
Understanding	Understanding	Understanding	Understanding
Compassionate	Compassionate	Compassionate	Compassionate
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
Soft Spoken	Soft Spoken	-------	-------
Warm	Warm	Warm	Warm
Tender	Tender	Tender	Tender
Gullible	Gullible	-------	-------
Childlike	-------	-------	-------
Does not use harsh language	-------	-------	-------
Loves Children	-------	-------	-------
Gentle	Gentle	Gentle	Gentle

* Loadings of .50 or above

The current study matched Ballard-Reisch and Elton's findings, conducted in 1992, on nine of Bem's (1974) femininity items. While Wheeless & Dierks-Stewart's research (1981) was limited to the top 10 items loading on this factor, the current research findings are very similar. More items from the current study included those which might seem less desirable (i.e., "yielding," "gullible," "soft spoken"). The BSRI items "shy," "flatterable," "childlike," "does not use harsh language," and

"loves children," did not yield significant loadings in the current study, or in the two comparative studies. It should be noted that the two comparative studies used in Table 9 used combined male and female samples, thus limiting the extent to which direct comparisons can be made. However, these were comparisons of item factor loadings and not self-identity to Bem's personality characteristics.

All three studies in Table 9 (conducted in three different decades) yielded endorsements of Bem's (1974) feminine items "affectionate," "sympathetic," "sensitive to the needs of others," "understanding," "compassionate," "eager to soothe hurt feelings," "warm," and "tender." It is possible that these items are consistently considered to be socially desirable for women. The largest substantive cluster (see boxed clusters in Table 9) of items seem to reflect relational and nurturant qualities.

Another comparison with the current sample data was made, again conducted in a different decade, with Bledsoe's (1983) sample of 44 female teachers from 6 school systems in New York. Table 10 contains the 14 items that loaded at .50 on the Femininity factor for the current research, and the factor loadings on the same items from Bledsoe's research findings.

Table 10. Van Belthowing's Femininity factor: Factor item loading* comparisons with Bledsoe

Item name	Van Belthowing (2000)*** N = 65	Bledsoe (1983) N = 44
Tender	.80	.79
Sympathetic	.79	.68
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	.76	<.50
Gentle	.75	.82
Understanding	.72	.77
Sensitive to the needs of others	.72	.82
Warm	.67	.63
Affectionate	.65	<.50
Loyal	.63	<.50
Soft spoken	.59	.58
Compassionate	.55	.86
Gullible	.55	<.50
Feminine	.53	.55
Yielding	.51	<.50

* Loadings of .5 or above

Compared to 14 in the current research, only nine items from Bem's list of feminine items loaded in Bledsoe's findings. Some items from the current research loaded higher and some lower than in Bledsoe's analysis. A notable difference was on the item "compassionate," much higher in Bledsoe's than in the current research.

"Generational" analysis

The current research data were divided into three "generational" groupings. Each group consisted of lesbians who were in their twenties at some point in each time period (1950s & 1960s, 1970s & 1980s, and 1990s & 2000). The three time periods correspond to different periods of feminist philosophy (see Chapter Two) and as such, have been labeled- Pre-feminism, Modern feminism, and Postmodern feminism.

Table 11. Top ten* factor** analyzed masculinity and femininity adjectives by age category (describing themselves now)

Pre-Feminism (current age 60-80) N = 9		Modern Feminism (current age 40-59) N = 32		Postmodern Feminism (current age 20-39) N = 24	
Femininity	Masculinity	Femininity	Masculinity	Femininity	Masculinity
Sympathetic	Willing to take risks	Sympathetic	Forceful	Sympathetic	Self-reliant
Understanding	Forceful	Tender	Assertive	Gentle	Self-sufficient
Self-sufficient	**Soft spoken**	Loyal	Masculine	Sensitive to needs of others	Independent
Strong personality	**Yielding**	Warm	Strong personality	Understanding	Strong personality
Aggressive	**Shy**	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Independent	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Willing to take a stand
Competitive	Makes decisions easily	Soft spoken	Aggressive	Affectionate	Acts as a leader
Tender	Willing to take a stand	Understanding	Defends own beliefs	Tender	Has leadership qualities
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	**Loyal**	**Self-sufficient**	Willing to take risks	Yielding	Defends own beliefs
Compassionate	Independent	Gullible		Soft spoken	Dominant
Defends own beliefs	Analytical	**Individualistic**		Compassionate	

* In order of strength of leading
** At .50 Factor Loading

The alignment as well as crossover of gender traits (i.e., feminine items on the Masculinity factor or masculine items on the Femininity factor) among the participants is presented in Table 11. The group with the most crossover (five on the Femininity factor and four on the Masculinity factor) was the Pre-feminism group, consisting of women who are currently 60 to 80 years old. Interestingly, the adjectives "masculine" and "feminine" did not load significantly on either factor for this group. These women would have been in their 20s and 30s during the 1950s and early 1960s. It could be that items crossing over were characteristics lesbians of

that time period considered desirable or at least consistent with their life needs. Of course, placing respondents into "generational" categories assumes that they identified as lesbian when they were in their twenties and thirties. It is highly likely that at least some respondents did not even consider themselves lesbian at that time. Another possibility is that it is age, rather than generation, that is driving these responses, or that such a small sample (N=9) results may have incurred a type 1 error.

As Table 11 shows, as the current age category of respondents declines, there are progressively fewer crossover items. In fact, in the young Postmodern feminism group, there were no crossover items on either factor. In all three "generational" categories, "sympathetic" was the highest loading feminine item. Masculinity, however, clearly varies by category. It is the youngest (Postmodern feminism) group for which the independence-related items lost most strongly. In Modern feminism category, the highest masculine items emphasize assertiveness and forcefulness. Like the Femininity factor for the Pre-feminism group, the Masculinity factor is blurred. As indicated earlier, the BSRI was not developed until the mid 1970s, subsequent to the "coming of age" of the pre-feminism group. Thus it could be that items thought to be socially desirable for women were different prior to the 1970s. It should also be mentioned that these findings reflect respondents' self-descriptions now.

Table 12 presents the mean Masculinity and Femininity scores, (with their medians and standard deviations) for each "generational" group. The mean

Femininity score is highest for the Pre-feminism group and lowest for the Postmodern-feminism group.

Table 12. "Generational" groups: Mean Masculinity and Femininity scores, with median and standard deviations

	Masculinity			Femininity		
	Mean	Median	SD	Mean	Median	SD
Pre-feminist	5.46	5.40	.62	5.32	5.30	.67
Modern-feminist	5.02	5.13	.58	5.03	5.13	.64
Post-modern-feminist	5.27	5.35	.56	4.97	4.95	.83

The mean Masculinity score is also highest for the Pre-feminism group, but lowest for the Modern feminism group. Standard deviations were similar for all groups, indicating that approximately 68% of the observations lie within less than one standard deviation of the mean.

As age increases, the Femininity mean increases, but the Masculinity mean is lowest for the middle age group. One suggestion for this latter finding is that the personality characteristics associated with men were seen as oppressive to women in the modern feminist period, so the Modern-feminism group might not identified with them as strongly. Suggestions for the lower Femininity mean in the youngest group could reflect a backlash to feminism, or that the items that have been associated do not mean the same to women today.

Findings suggest that the current sample of lesbian women's self-attributes are similar in many ways to those of presumed heterosexual women (and men). However, whether compared to findings from all-female or male/female samples, the lesbians in the current sample overall appear to identify more strongly with many feminine and masculine items. Additionally, for the current group masculinity

emphasized independence and self-reliance, and femininity focuses on relational and nurturant traits.

Research Question 2

Are masculinity and femininity categories, as framed by Bem, consistent with lesbian identities of butch and femme?

As stated earlier, the butch/femme continuum for orientation identity, was collapsed and dichotomized into three categories - butch, femme, and neutral (neither butch nor femme). Shown in Table 13 are the frequency data from the research sample who identified as either butch, femme, or neutral (neither butch nor femme)

Table 13. Frequencies of butch and femme and neutral identities (N = 63)

Gender Identity	N	%
Butch	19	30
Femme	29	46
Neutral (neither butch nor femme)	15	24
Total	63	100

Of the 62 women who answered this question, three-quarters identified themselves as either butch or femme. Nearly half (46%) of these identified as femme.

Table 14 presents the means and standard deviations for the Masculinity and Femininity scales for butch and femme lesbians in the present research, and in research conducted by Oldham, Farnill, and Ball (1982) (whose sample consisted of lesbian and heterosexual women).

Table 14. Comparisons of BSRI Scores: means and standard deviations

BSRI Scale Means	Van Belthowing (N = 49)			Oldham *et al.* (N = 81)	
	Total Sample (N = 65)	Butch N = 20	Femme N = 29	Lesbian N = 37	Heterosexual women N = 44
Masculinity	5.27	5.45	5.04	4.84	4.40
(SD)	.68	.56	.54	.63	.70
Femininity	5.07	4.81	5.39	4.78	4.84
(SD)	.78	.64	.67	.54	.58

Personality characteristics that are stereotypically applied to lesbians who identify as either butch or femme are similar to those for men and women, respectively (see Loulan 1990). The current sample offers some affirmation of the stereotypes, in that which butch lesbians scored higher on the total Masculinity scale, and femme lesbians scored significantly higher than butch lesbians with respect to the Femininity scale. Both the butch and femme lesbian groups in the current study scored considerably higher than Oldham *et al.*'s 37 lesbian and 44 presumed heterosexual women did on the total Masculinity scale. Women who identified as femme from the current study scored substantially higher with respect to Femininity than any of the other groups.

Butch/femme

Table 15 presents the percentage of respondents within each of the butch and femme samples who qualified as masculine, feminine, or androgynous as a function of the Androgyny *t* ratio. Respondents are classified as sex typed, whether masculine or feminine, if the Androgyny *t* ratio reaches statistical significance

($|t|$=2.025, df = 38, $p < .05$), and they are classified as androgynous if the absolute value of the t ratio is less than or equal to one. Table 15 also indicates the percentage of respondents who fall between these various cutoff points. These cutoff points are somewhat arbitrary, as each researcher chooses her own cutoff points. The current research utilized Bem's (1974) cutoff points.

Table 15. Percentage of respondents in the butch and femme samples classified as masculine, feminine, or androgynous

Item	Butch N = 19	Femme N = 29	Neutrals N = 14
% feminine (t =2.025)	5	24	0
% near feminine (1 < t <2.025)	0	17	14
% androgynous (- 1 = t= + 1)	32	48	36
% near masculine (- 2.025 < 1 < - 1)	16	0	36
% masculine (t = - 2.025)	47	10	14

Nearly 50% of the current study's femme respondents qualified as androgynous, while only 24% qualified as feminine as a function of the Androgyny t ratio. Regarding the butch respondents, nearly 50% qualified as masculine as a function of the Androgyny t ratio, which was less than 2.025. According to Bem's definition of "sex-appropriate" and "sex-inappropriate" types (1974:158), one might describe half of the butch lesbians as "sex-inappropriate," i.e., high endorsement of masculine items. On the other hand, the findings tend to support the prior research showing a link between butch and masculine identity. In this respect, then butch lesbians who are masculine-typed are, in the lesbian context, gender aligned.

Table 16 illustrates the "generational" groups' self-identification as butch/femme and the percent of BSRI gender alignment. The Masculinity score for each respondent was subtracted from the Femininity score and multiplied by 2.322,

(which would assign an approximate *t*-ratio value, as suggested by Bem, 1974), allowing for an Androgyny score to be assigned to each respondent. Bem (1974) points out that high positive scores indicate femininity and high negative scores indicate masculinity. The closer to zero, the more a person is androgynous.

Table 16. "Generational" categories by, self-Identification and BSRI scores

"Generational" Category	Butch/Femme Scale Scores	n	%	Masculinity (n)	Femininity (n)	Androgyny (n)	% BSRI* Gender Alignment
Postmodern-feminism	Butch	5	23	5	0	0	100
N = 22	Neutral	6	27	4	1	1	17
(Missing = 2)	Femme	11	50	3	4	4	36
Modern feminism	Butch	10	31	5	1	4	50
N = 32	Neutral	6	19	3	0	3	50
	Femme	16	50	0	7	8	44
Pre-feminism	Butch	4	50	2	0	2	50
N = 8	Neutral	2	25	0	1	1	50
(Missing = 1)	Femme	2	25	0	1	1	50
Column totals				22	15	14	

*Butch = Masculine; Femme = Feminine; Neutral = Androgynous

The butch/femme scale score was compared with the subject's BSRI score. Results show that only women in the Postmodern feminism group (the youngest) who identified as butch also had a BSRI score that was gender aligned (Masculinity). Both the Postmodern feminism and Modern feminism groups consisted of more women identifying as femme than butch or neutral (neither butch nor femme). Most divided was the Modern feminism group, with 50% of butch, 50% of neutral and 44% of femmes gender aligned in their BSRI scores.

The data presented in Table 17 are the outcomes of a nonparametric test of association, correlating for each "generational" group, the categories "butch" and "femme" and the items "masculine" and "feminine respectively, using Spearman's rho

(Sprinthall 1987). Since the current data are ordinal (rank-ordered, derived only from the order of numbers, not the differences between them) it was necessary to conduct a nonparametric test.

Table 17. Nonparametric correlations between Bem's" feminine" and "masculine" items with femme and butch identities, by "generational" group

Item		Pre-feminism		Modern-feminism		Post-modern-feminism	
		Femme	Butch	Femme	Butch	Femme	Butch
Feminine	Correlation coefficient	.48		.53		.54	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.19		.01		.01	
	N	9		32		24	
	Critical value	.83		.47		.52	
Masculine	Correlation coefficient		.80*		.35*		.39
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.01		.15		n/a
	N		9		32		24
	Critical value		.70		.36		.52

* Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

For most groups, there was either a moderate or high correlation between femme and butch and the respective BSRI "feminine" and "masculine" items. Exceptions were for the Butch lesbians in the Pre-feminism group and the femme lesbians in both the Modern-feminism and Postmodern feminism groups. For all three groups, the critical value was lower ($r_{s.05(9)} = .70$; $r_{s.01(32)} = .47$, and $r_{s.01(24)} = .52$ respectively) than the calculated correlations of $r_s.80$; $r_s.53$ and $r_s.54$. The correlations tells us that, at least with the butch lesbians in the Pre-feminism group and the femmes in both the Modern feminism and Postmodern feminism groups, the items "masculine" and "feminine" do not equate with butch and femme, respectively.

There was a significant positive correlation between the items "feminine" and "masculine" and the identities femme and butch for the Pre-feminism femmes, the

Modern feminism butch women, and the Postmodern feminism butch women. Thus, it seems that feminism may have had an impact on Bem's (1974) personality characteristics associated with femininity.

Butch and masculinity/femininity

The meaning of "butch" has been synonymous with such adjectives traditionally associated with the male -- athletic, assertive, forceful, dominant, masculine, aggressive, and having a strong personality (Loulan 1990). Table 18 presents the means and standard deviations for masculine and feminine items for the lesbians in the current sample who exclusively identified as butch.

Table 18. Butches: Means and standard deviation (SD) for masculinity and femininity N = 19

Masculine Items*			Feminine Items*		
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
Defends own beliefs	6.25	1.02	**Loyal**	**6.05**	**1.10**
Self-reliant	6.20	.52	**Compassionate**	**5.85**	**.59**
Independent	6.20	1.01	**Understanding**	**5.74**	**.73**
Willing to take a stand	6.10	.85	**Affectionate**	**5.65**	**.81**
Self-sufficient	6.00	.79	**Sympathetic**	**5.55**	**1.00**
Analytical	5.79	1.13	**Warm**	**5.55**	**.89**
Strong personality	5.75	.91	**Sensitive to the needs of others**	**5.50**	**1.10**
Has leadership qualities	5.75	1.02	**Cheerful**	**5.35**	**.88**
Individualistic	5.75	1.33	**Gentle**	**5.35**	**.99**
Willing to take risks	5.70	.86	**Tender**	**5.30**	**1.22**
Ambitious	5.50	.95	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	4.95	1.47
Assertive	5.40	1.10	Loves children	4.80	1.24
Acts as a leader	5.30	.80	Yielding	4.35	1.39
Makes decisions easily	5.05	1.10	Soft-spoken	4.30	1.42
Masculine	5.05	1.28	Flatterable	4.25	1.29
Competitive	4.85	1.42	Shy	4.10	1.41
Dominant	4.80	1.44	Childlike	3.68	1.73
Athletic	4.55	1.67	Does not use harsh language	3.55	1.88
Aggressive	4.45	1.76	Feminine	3.35	1.50
Forceful	4.40	1.35	Gullible	3.20	1.67

* Bolded items had mean scores higher than the "masculine" item

The top five masculine personality characteristics, combined, may be seen as descriptive of someone who is competent and self-assured. The feminine item that had the highest mean among butch lesbians was "loyal" (6.05), which exceeded the

"masculine" item (5.05). Nine of the 20 feminine items other feminine items that had higher means than the "masculine" item. Twenty-five percent of the femininity items scored notably higher than "masculine".

It appears, then, that the original characteristics that once were linked to a butch and to masculine are no longer valid, and that new descriptions emerged (see Chapter Two).

Femme and masculinity/femininity

Again, we look to Joann Loulan (1990) for the meaning of a femme lesbian. In her book *The Lesbian Erotic Dance*, Loulan defines femme lesbians as cheerful, yielding, shy, affectionate, flatterable, feminine, sympathetic, sensitive to the needs of others, understanding, compassionate, and eager to soothe hurt feelings. Grouping all respondents from the current research who identified as femme, and analyzing the data on them, Table 19 provides their mean item scores.

Table 19. Femmes: Means and standard deviation (SD) for masculine and feminine items
N = 29

Masculinity*			Femininity*		
Items	Mean	SD	Items	Mean	SD
Defends own beliefs	**5.89**	**.69**	Loyal	6.36	.68
Individualistic	**5.89**	**.92**	Sympathetic	6.00	.77
Independent	**5.79**	**.96**	Sensitive to the needs of others	6.00	.90
Self-sufficient	**5.79**	**.88**	Compassionate	6.00	.90
Analytical	**5.71**	**1.12**	Understanding	5.86	.80
Self-reliant	**5.61**	**1.07**	Warm	5.82	.94
Willing to take a stand	**5.57**	**.84**	Gentle	5.79	.88
Has leadership qualities	**5.54**	**.92**	Tender	5.75	1.04
Willing to take risks	**5.25**	**1.11**	Affectionate	5.71	.76
Acts as a leader	5.07	.96	Loves children	5.64	1.42
Ambitious	5.07	1.05	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	5.43	1.23
Assertive	5.00	1.15	Cheerful	5.32	.94
Strong personality	5.00	1.33	Feminine	5.18	1.31
Competitive	4.54	1.43	Yielding	4.93	1.02
Dominant	4.50	1.32	Does not use harsh language	4.89	1.69
Makes decisions easily	4.45	1.20	Shy	4.79	1.37
Forceful	4.36	1.42	Flatterable	4.64	1.47
Athletic	4.21	1.87	Soft-spoken	4.64	1.47
Aggressive	3.86	1.47	Gullible	4.29	1.72
Masculine	3.68	1.47	Childlike	4.07	1.61

* Bolded items had mean scores higher than the "feminine" item

The feminine items with means of 6.00 or above can be categorized as relational. Eight masculine items had higher means than the "feminine" item. Twenty-two percent of the masculinity items scored substantially higher than the "feminine" item.

As in the case of the butch lesbians, some of the original characteristics described a femme are no longer as valid (see Chapter 2).

When comparing the butch and femme data, the highest means were strikingly for the same or very similar items. Both groups highly identified with the items "defends own beliefs," "independent," "loyal," and "compassionate." The means for "masculine" and "feminine" were only average, with substantial variability (standard deviations).

Butch/femme: a heterosexual imitation or a thing of the past?

> *We have watched the decline of the butch/femme concept of relationship for sixteen years. It has been a gradual decline and...the stereotype has not yet vanished...Much change has taken place in the way all women (straight or gay) in this country think about [gender] roles and personal relationships*
>
> *Martin & Lyon 1977:81,83*

Several historians have suggested that butch/femme identities and relationships were not an impersonation of heterosexuality. During the height of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, some women in lesbian communities (Faderman 1992) frowned upon the butch/femme relationship. Many lesbian feminists considered butch/femme relationships to be an "imitation of heterosexuality," and regarded them as role relationships that acted out the oppression such couples had learned from mainstream culture (Faderman 1992:580).

Two questions were asked in the current study as to a) whether the identity of butch and femme is still a part of the lesbian community, and if so, b) is it an imitation of heterosexual relationships? Seventy-five percent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, when asked if butch/femme relationships are an imitation of heterosexual relationships, (as shown in Table 20).

Table 20. Butch/femme: an imitation of heterosexuality, by "generational" group				
"Generational" group	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Pre-feminists	0%	5%	5%	14%
Modern-feminists	3%	5%	12%	12%
Post-modern-feminists	1%	2%	2%	4%
% Total	6%	18%	29%	46%

The majority of respondents in each "generational" group disagreed with the statement that butch/femme relationships are an imitation of heterosexuality. However, none of the Pre-feminists (who came of age at a time when traditional butch/femme relationships were arguably most acceptable) strongly disagreed with the statement. The Postmodern feminism (and youngest) group seemed to be most differentiated in their opinions. Perhaps they are too young and too far removed to understand the nature of roles involved in traditional butch/femme relationships.

Table 21 presents the results to the question as to whether butch/femme lesbians are a thing of the past. While almost 10% or the respondents said that butch and femme lesbians are a thing of the past, a resounding 90% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 21. Butch/femme: Are butch and femme lesbians a thing of the past, by "generational" groups				
"Generational" groups	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Pre-feminists	0%	2%	10%	12%
Modern-feminists	0%	3%	19%	10%
Post-modern-feminists	0%	1%	3%	5%
% Total Answers	0%	9%	49%	41%

These findings suggest that many lesbians who identify as butch or femme today have discovered new ways of distinguishing these identities, yet still maintain ties with the historical butch/femme identity of the 1950s. Although few believe that lesbians have generally abandoned the butch/femme dichotomy, the great majority

also sees butch/femme relationships as different from male/female (heterosexual) relationships.

Martin and Lyon (1977) stated 23 years ago that butch/femme relationships were gradually declining. Evidence from this research suggests the opposite. Of the total sample, 29 (45%) identified as femme compared to 19 (29%) who identified as butch. Fourteen (22%) identified as independent, with 2 (3%) respondents not answering this question. Respondents who were currently 20 to 39 years old identified as femme twice as often as butch or independent (neither butch nor femme), but also identified strongly with some masculine as well as some feminine items.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The central research question of the current study had to do with self- and stereotypically- gendered identities of lesbians. The purpose was to determine the nature and form of gender identity and gender stereotypes among women who self-identify as lesbians, and more specifically, to determine whether or not "gender" means the same to lesbians as it does to heterosexual women. Identity measures were Bem's (1974) Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) and a butch-femme rating scale. The sample consisted of 65 women who self-identified as lesbian.

The BSRI

Some prior studies of sex roles and gender attributes have included comparisons of homosexuals with heterosexuals. Probably the most consistent findings has been that lesbians had higher masculinity scores than heterosexual women, but that lesbians and heterosexual women had similar femininity scores (Finlay & Scheltema 1991; LaTorre & Wendenberg 1983; Oldham, Farnill, & Ball 1982; Oberstone & Sukonek 1976).

The assumption that masculine and feminine items on the BSRI are gender-orientation-specific was not supported by the current study. The significant factor loadings (.50 and above) on 14 (70%) of the 20 feminine items, and nine (45%) of the 20 masculine items, were comparable in number and overall substance to findings from other studies using the BSRI, with either or both heterosexual and homosexual samples. For example, 11 (55%) masculine items and 8 (40%) feminine

items loaded at .50 or above in Bledsoe's (1983) study. Consistent with prior research, the analysis of the data in this study revealed two highly reliable factors, reflecting masculinity and femininity. Also generally consistent with research following Bem's, the current study found that some of the BSRI characteristics may no longer be linked to masculinity and femininity.

However, the lesbians in the current sample did identify slightly more strongly with masculine attributes (Masculinity scale mean = 5.27) than with feminine attributes (Femininity scale mean = 5.07). Interestingly, the current sample's mean Masculinity scores were higher than those of women (heterosexual, sexual orientation unknown, and lesbians) in prior research.

The substance of the masculine items that loaded most highly on the Masculinity factor for the current sample could be thought of as reflecting strength but not power over others. The items "independence" and "self-reliant" loaded highly, while such items as "dominant," "aggressive," and "forceful" did not load significantly.

In turn, the essential quality of the feminine items that loaded most highly on the Femininity factor, for the current sample, represented relational and nurturant traits. For instance, the feminine items "warm," "affectionate," loyal" and "sympathetic" loaded highly, while such items as "childlike," and cheerful" did not load significantly.

As indicated from prior research subjects, and even more strongly among the lesbians in this study, traits such as "cheerful," "shy," "flatterable," "childlike," "does

not use harsh language," and "loves children" may no longer be self-descriptions of lesbians or heterosexual women. The lesbians in this study described themselves as assertive and independent and also as nurturant and sensitive. It may be that terms like "agency" and "emphatic" will in the future be more useful than the dichotomized masculine and feminine labels.

Butch/femme

Heterosexuality, as a social construct with a specific political and economic agenda, lends itself well to the claim that butch/femme role playing between women can't be simply an imitation of heterosexual roles. A woman in the butch role is still a woman, without access to male privilege and with nothing invested in the systematic subordination of women (Rich 1993).

The literature suggests that lesbian women have defined and continue to define themselves as butch or femme (c.f. Case 1993; Goodloe 1993; Faderman 1991). Although the current sample was small (N = 65), the distribution among butch and femme was fairly even (46% femme and 30% butch). Only about one-quarter of the sample selected the neutral category on the butch/femme scale. The women in this study did not affirm the common stereotype that lesbians engage in butch/femme role-playing that mimics heterosexual roles. However, these women did not think butch/femme relationships were a thing of the past. It is suggested that little attention has been paid to the possibility that butch and femme identities are more complicated than the "mirroring of roles within heterosexual pairings" suggests.

There is some controversy in the literature as to whether butch/femme relationships are most commonly found in the working class. Faderman (1992) argues that, unlike those from the 1950s and 1960s, butch/femme lesbians are no longer only from the working-class, but may also be "intellectuals whose roots [are] in the middle class" (587). It was not possible to examine this contention in this study. Respondent's were asked about their current income (most were quite moderate) and their education level (over one-third were high school graduates with no college). However, these two measures were insufficient to comment on the women's social class background

As stated earlier prior research (Grahn 1991; Phelan 1989) has suggested that butch and femme identities are not necessarily imitative of the heterosexual relationship. Others (c.f. Ponse 1978), however, believe that butch/femme role playing "involves the adaptation of masculine and feminine roles, modeled after typifications of...roles in the heterosexual world" (Ponse 1978:115). Engagement in role-playing can to some extent be play-acting and may not always be an expression of one's true self.

Findings from the current study showed that self-identification as butch or femme was differentially related to BSRI scores. Almost half of the femmes had Androgynous BSRI scores, although the majority of non-Androgyny femmes had scores qualifying them as feminine or near feminine. Almost two-thirds of the butches, on the other hand, had masculine or near-masculine BSRI scores. The majority of those identifying as neutral were androgynous or near-masculine.

Femmes identified strongly with the nurturant, relational femininity traits, and almost as strongly with the independence-like masculine traits. Similarly, butches' identification with the independence-like masculine traits was only slightly higher than their identification with the nurturant, relational feminine characteristics. In other words, the majority of butches and femmes identified as masculine and feminine, respectively.

It is likely that the BSRI does not capture all aspects of lesbian identity. That some other factors may be related to identity, which might include the effect of a shared sub-culture or variations in how gender roles or the conception of masculinity and femininity are used. Money and Erhardt (1972) define gender role as "everything that a person says and does, to indicate to others or to the self the degree that one is either male or female or ambivalent..." (4). Ponse also proposes that there is a "commonsensical, unexamined assumption about the ways in which these identities are interrelated and a presumption about the direction they should take" (1978:24).

Gender schema theory vs. Identity theory

As presented in chapter 2, a person becomes gender schematic through prescriptive standards or guides which evaluate the match between preferences, attitudes, behavior, and personal attributes against the prototype (prevailing definitions of masculinity and femininity in the culture at large). Bem (1974) and Ponse (1978) point out that most people believe that an individual is a boy or girl, and proceed to interact with that individual as a member of that sex. The individual

is most likely to hold the same view, that is, there is congruency between sex and gender identity. Said another way, a written "social biography program" (Ponse 1978) in which sex and gender are highlighted emerges during socialization, and has long-term enduring effects.

However, identity theory may offers an alternative to gender schema theory in consideration of lesbian gender identity, by conceptualizing identities as processes that can be both stable and changeable. According to identity theory, cognitive development of self moves an individual toward others like herself and away from those who are not like her. A sexual identity is established with at least two conditions. Ferguson (1981) states that a person cannot have a sexual identity if she does not consciously believe she does. A second condition for sexual identity is that there has to be a culture where the concept has relevance. As such, a person cannot have a lesbian identity unless the concept lesbian exists in the person's cultural environment.

According to identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance. Reference groups play an important part in identity formation, and what is necessary for role identity acquisition is the knowledge about the role based on the shared experiences the group members have to accomplish valued interactions. As the differentiated model demonstrates, the role standard (i.e., emphasized behavioral aspects) may be different for different groups -- distinct aspects may be weighted differently because

different groups are trying to use the same role to accomplish different goals. Through interaction with a reference group, cognitive comparisons of self to the role occur.

From the current data, it cannot be concluded that the BSRI is a valid instrument for characterizing lesbian gender identities of butch and femme. For example, the androgyny mean score for the current sample was a negative .46, which places the group as a whole in the androgyny category.

The current data suggest that identity theory may be useful for understanding lesbian gender identity. By the examination of the bsri items and the "generational" groups, indicate that there is more than one possible meaning to lesbian gender identity. Different combinations of BSRI items emerged for each "generational" group. The "generational" groups were thought of as reference groups, it could be suggested that these three groups attached different meanings to the role of lesbian. For instance, the "pre-feminism" reference group may see themselves as risking more to identify as lesbian (specifically as butch or femme); the "modern feminism" reference group may see the role of lesbian as political, consisting of moderately aggressive masculinity characteristics. Finally, the "postmodern feminism" reference group may consist of lesbians whose gender identity is more fluid.

Indeed, the words of one respondent (written on the back of her survey form), suggest far greater complexity to the meaning of lesbian gender identity than the BSRI could capture:

> "I don't feel my gender - I.D. falls on this scale [butch/femme scale] - I would call myself a boydyke or something similar - I I.D. with the lesbian community but not 'as a lesbian' - I would be hard-pressed to explain any differences between myself and a 'lesbian' it's just not the label that seems to describe my experiential conception of myself. I'm sure its a matter mainly of the historical moment within which I've come out and settled into the queer community - maybe [at] another time my initial feelings of non-femininity (for lack of a better description) would have been explained to me by others (queers) as butch, and as I developed my queer identity I would have (consciously or unconsciously) moulded [sic] my behavior and outward expression to fit the role laid out for a butch [woman]. As it is, I've known relatively few [women] who identify as butch, instead the [women] around me with a masculine gender expression call themselves boys or fags. I associate 'butch' with a set of constraints (as well as the positive qualities) such as emotional restraint, lack of vulnerability, social grimness etc. which don't fit well with me - instead of re-working the role I never tried to occupy it. Also, I rarely date femme [women], so I don't feel part of that set of roles.

Limitations and further research

No theory can adequately explain all dimensions of the context, or of the acquisition and maintenance of gender identity. However, the belief that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive genders and assigned to males and females, respectively, was not supported by the current study.

The findings, of course, reflect the views of a sample of lesbian women who were primarily White; also many of them belonged to lesbian groups or organizations. As measured by education and income, the women in this study were largely working to middle-class, which may be a factor in the finding that the majority identified as either butch or femme (as opposed to neutral).

A wider segment of the lesbian community should be surveyed in order to address more fully some of the contradictory findings between this and prior research.

Findings may be differentially affected by methodological and analytical techniques. This study, for example, used median-splits to determine sex-role categories. Although this is customary, other researchers using lesbian samples (Hawkins et al. 1988; Vance & Green 1984; Stokes et al. 1983; Oldham et al. 1982) have used alternative scoring methods.

It may also be that, the understanding of sex roles among homosexuals vs. heterosexuals is quite different, and that such differences are not captured through self-identification with the traits measured by the BSRI. This possibly could be explored in future studies.

The analysis of "generational" (or age) groupings provided some interesting findings that could be addressed in future research. Although lesbian-feminists during the 1970s frowned upon butch/femme dyads, there still existed a subculture of women who identified as either butch or femme during this time period (Faderman 1992). Now, in the new postmodern lesbian discourse, butch/femme arrangements are more acceptable, as well as more flexible, and some such arrangements are seen as "playing at it rather than being it" (Lyon 1987). Data from the current research are compatible with Faderman's (1992) notion that butch and femme lesbians today express themselves in a variety of images -- from "aggressive butch" to "passive butch," from "old-fashioned femme" to "stone femme."

Further consideration of comparison groups is suggested. It would be interesting, for example, to compare lesbians who self-identify as butch with hetero- and homosexual men. Generational comparisons could also be expanded. And, our

understanding of lesbian identities and gender roles could certainly benefit from more inclusive focus on racial and ethnic diversity.

NOTES

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1 For the purpose of this study I have excluded the twenty filler items.

2 "herms," "merms," and "ferms" are all definitions of intersexual bodies - depending on the amount of male or female genitalia a person possesses.

3 Translated by Jim Powell

<http://www.sappho.com/poetry/historical/sappho.html#ToAndromeda>

4 <http://www.butch-femme.com>

5 Quoted in Patricia Elliot and Nancy Mandell (1995).

6 "Sappho was a Right on Woman." 1972. Page 158

7 <http://www.butch-femme.com>

8 Quoted in "The Persistent Desire: A Butch-Femme Reader." 1992. Page 84.

9 Among middle-class lesbians, there seemed to be more concern with social respectability than with social change (Faderman 1991).

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Lesbian Gender Identities: An Expansion of Bem's Sex-Role Inventory.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sheilagh Van Belthowing from Portland State University, Department of Sociology. The researcher hopes to learn if the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) research was replicated, using a sample of lesbian women, how the ratings of masculinity and femininity would compare to past researchers' ratings of masculinity and femininity? This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree, and under supervision of Dr. Kathryn Farr at PSU.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire on gender identities within a lesbian context. While participating in this study, there should be no risks, discomfort, or inconveniences that are not part of the standard practice of completing a questionnaire. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but the study may help to increase knowledge which may help others in the future.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and it will not affect your relationship with Portland State University and/or the Department of Sociology. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with Portland State University and/or the Department of Sociology.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-8182. If you have any questions about the study itself, contact Sheilagh Van Belthowing at Sociology Department, 217Y Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-8368.

Please indicate how well each of the following personality characteristics describes yourself.

Personality Characteristic	Always True	Almost Always True	Sometimes True	Neutral	Sometimes Not True	Almost Never True	Never True
Acts as a leader							
Affectionate							
Aggressive							
Ambitious							
Analytical							
Assertive							
Athletic							
Cheerful							
Childlike							
Compassionate							
Competitive							
Defends own beliefs							
Does not use harsh language							
Dominant							
Eager to soothe hurt feelings							
Feminine							
Flatterable							
Forceful							
Gentle							
Gullible							
Has leadership qualities							
Independent							
Individualistic							
Loves children							
Loyal							
Makes decisions easily							
Masculine							
Self-reliant							
Self-sufficient							
Sensitive to the needs of others							
Shy							
Soft spoken							
Strong personality							
Sympathetic							
Tender							
Understanding							
Warm							
Willing to take a stand							
Willing to take risks							
Yielding							

Please Turn Over

PLEASE INDICATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

1. Butch/femme relationships are usually an imitation of heterosexual relationships.

____Strongly agree _____ Disagree
____ Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being Butch and 10 being Femme) where do you see your gender identity?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Butch _____ Femme

PLEASE INDICATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT

3. Butch and femme lesbians are a thing of the past.

____Strongly agree _____ Disagree
____ Agree _____ Strongly Disagree

4. What is your age? _____

5. What is your race/ethnicity (circle all that apply)
   a. African American
   b. Asian/Pacific Islander
   c. Latina
   d. Middle Eastern American
   e. Native American
   f. White/Not of Hispanic Origin
   g. Other _____

6. What is your personal yearly income?
   a. 0-$10,000
   b. $10,001-$20,000
   c. $20,001-$30,000
   d. $30,001-$40,000
   e. $40,001-$60,000
   f. $60,001-$100,000
   g. over $100,000

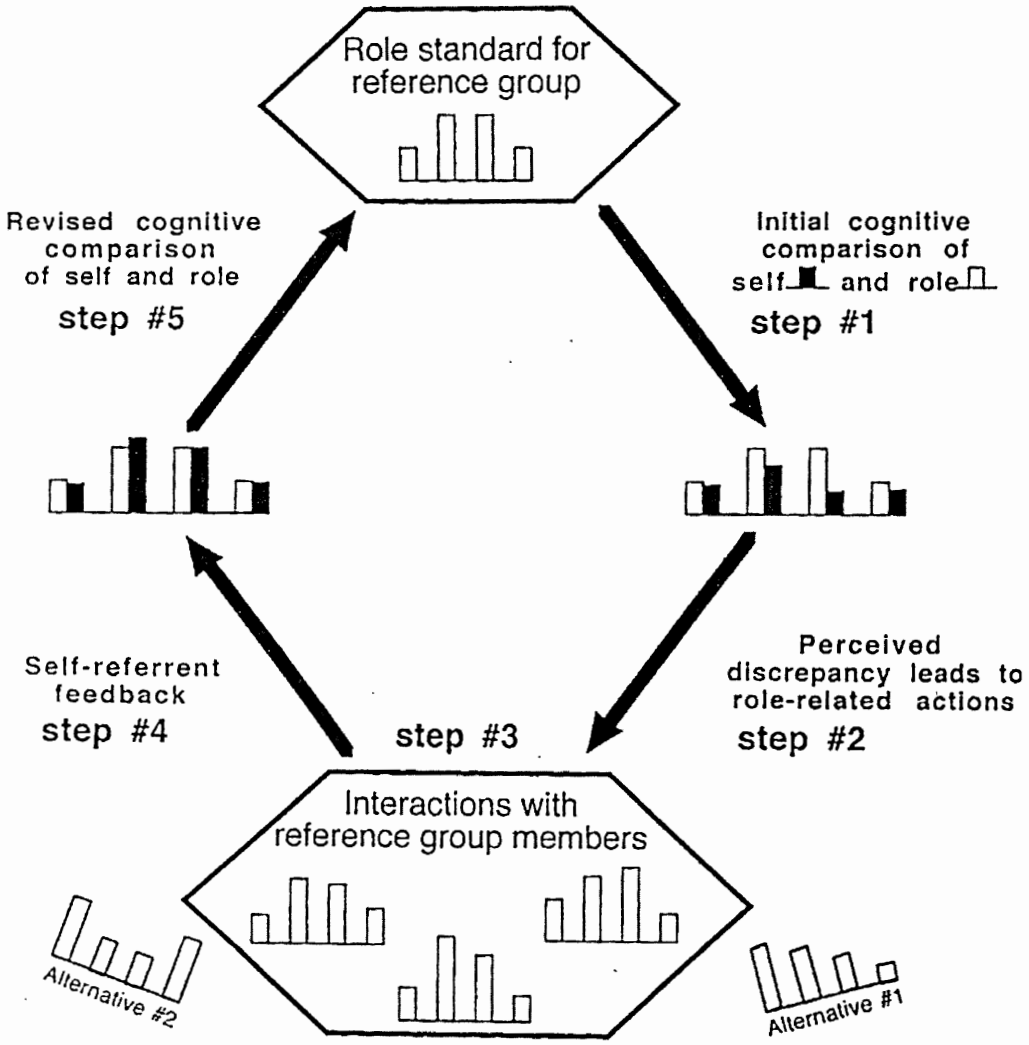
7. What is your highest education level completed?
   a. Grade school
   b. Highschool/GED
   c. Some college
   d. Bachelor
   e. Master
   f. Doctorate
   g. Other professional degree _____

Thank You

APPENDIX B:

DIFFERENTIATED MODEL

Figure 1. Differentiated model of role-identity acquistion



APPENDIX C:

PRE-TEST INSTRUMENT

Lesbian Gender Identities: An Expansion of Bem's Sex-Role Inventory.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sheilagh Van Belthowing from Portland State University, Department of Sociology. The researcher hopes to learn if the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) research was replicated, using a sample of lesbian women, how the ratings of masculinity and femininity would compare to past researchers' ratings of masculinity and femininity? This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree, and under supervision of Dr. Kathryn Farr at PSU.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire on gender identities within a lesbian context. While participating in this study, there should be no risks, discomfort, or inconveniences that are not part of the standard practice of completing a questionnaire. You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but the study may help to increase knowledge which may help others in the future.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and it will not affect your relationship with Portland State University and/or the Department of Sociology. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with Portland State University and/or the Department of Sociology.

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Please indicate how well each of the following personality characteristics describes yourself.

Personality Characteristic	Always True	Almost Always True	Sometimes True	Neutral	Sometimes Not True	Almost Never True	Never True
Acts as a leader							
Affectionate							
Aggressive							
Ambitious							
Analytical							
Assertive							
Athletic							
Cheerful							
Childlike							
Compassionate							
Competitive							
Defends own beliefs							
Does not use harsh language							
Dominant							
Eager to soothe hurt feelings							
Feminine							
Flatterable							
Forceful							
Gentle							
Gullible							
Has leadership qualities							
Independent							
Individualistic							
Loves children							
Loyal							
Makes decisions easily							
Masculine							
Self-reliant							
Self-sufficient							
Sensitive to the needs of others							
Shy							
Soft spoken							
Strong personality							
Sympathetic							
Tender							
Understanding							
Warm							
Willing to take a stand							
Willing to take risks							
Yielding							

Please Turn Over

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your race/ethnicity (circle all that apply)
   a. African American
   b. Asian/Pacific Islander
   c. Latina
   d. Middle Eastern American
   e. Native American
   f. White/Not of Hispanic Origin
   g. Other _____

3. What is your personal yearly income?
   a. 0-$10,000
   b. $10,001-$20,000
   c. $20,001-$30,000
   d. $30,001-$40,000
   e. $40,001-$60,000
   f. $60,001-$100,000
   g. over $10,000

4. What is your highest education level completed?
   a. Grade school
   b. Highschool/GED
   c. Some college
   d. Bachelor
   e. Master
   f. Doctorate
   g. Other professional degree _____

5. Which of the following best describes yourself?
   a. butch
   b. femme
   c. masculine
   d. feminine
   e. none of the above

Thank You

APPENDIX D:

VAN BELTHOWING'S SAMPLE: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND FACTOR LOADINGS ON THE BSRI ITEMS

Appendix D. Means, standard deviations and factor loadings on the BSRI items

Item No. *	Description	M	SD	Femininity	Masculinity
1	Self-reliant	5.91	.89	.033	.681
2	Yielding	4.51	1.13	.512	.237
3	Defends own beliefs	6.09	.74	-.051	.646
4	Cheerful	5.26	.90	.335	-.133
5	Independent	6.02	.97	.020	.777
6	Shy	4.51	1.42	.337	-.048
7	Athletic	4.32	1.68	-.123	.221
8	Affectionate	5.72	.84	.646	.137
9	Assertive	5.23	1.07	-.292	.602
10	Flatterable	4.42	1.36	.309	-.167
11	Strong personality	5.47	1.18	-.119	.764
12	Loyal	6.23	.87	.626	.236
13	Forceful	4.26	1.40	.022	.361
14	Feminine	4.26	1.63	.526	-.333
15	Analytical	5.75	1.06	-.107	.079
16	Sympathetic	5.79	.80	.794	.215
17	Has leadership qualities	5.60	1.03	.061	.319
18	Sensitive to the needs of others	5.75	1.04	.718	.054
19	Willing to take risks	5.40	1.13	.197	.455
20	Understanding	5.81	.74	.723	.088
21	Makes decisions easily	4.82	1.26	.016	.167
22	Compassionate	5.93	.78	.545	.059
23	Self-sufficient	5.89	.82	.019	.608
24	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	5.26	1.30	.757	.018
25	Dominant	4.47	1.34	-.208	.414
26	Soft-spoken	4.30	1.55	.586	.130
27	Masculine	4.18	1.42	-.258	.381
28	Warm	5.74	.90	.668	.063
29	Willing to take a stand	5.89	.96	-.027	.575
30	Tender	5.53	1.00	.798	-.028
31	Aggressive	4.09	1.52	-.117	.496
32	Gullible	3.65	1.78	.549	-.219
33	Acts as a leader	5.19	.95	-.058	.275
34	Childlike	3.82	1.54	.368	-.148
35	Individualistic	5.75	1.14	.205	.542
36	Does not use harsh language	4.21	1.83	.473	-.458
37	Competitive	5.93	.78	.141	.272
38	Loves children	5.21	1.50	.391	-.098
39	Ambitious	5.16	1.00	.202	.415
40	Gentle	5.58	.92	.754	.029
Eigenvalues				7.44	5.48
Proportion of common variance				18%	13%
Total variance	32.3%				
N of cases	65				

* Odd-numbered items comprise the masculine scale; even-numbered items comprise the feminine scale